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A plea for sympathy and understanding in the portrayal of motherless daughters in Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction

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**A plea for sympathy and understanding in the portrayal of motherless
daughters in Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction**

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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This is to certify that the master's thesis of

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has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

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Introduction

At first glance, Elizabeth Gaskell appears to be the stereotypical Victorian woman. She was married, mothered four children, and assisted in her husband's Unitarian ministry. Without closer examination, Gaskell would have appeared to have been the perfect example of Victorian femininity; however, Gaskell was no 'angel in the house.' She sought to enact reform where she saw injustices, such as labor conditions for women. She spoke her opinions freely even if they conflicted with the dominant views of her husband's Unitarian congregation. Her writing subversively advocates for resisting the oppression of patriarchy. Her female heroines struggle to find an autonomous identity for themselves. Some succeed and some fail, but the struggle and the right to the struggle is what is important. Gaskell treats her heroines tenderly with a considerable amount of compassion and empathy. She knows how to write these women because she often includes elements of herself in these characters. Yet in her narration, she also appropriates a motherly tone toward the characters and the action. Her motherliness is what caused debate among feminist scholars on whether or not Gaskell was worth inclusion in the canon of women's literature.

Scholarly feminists working in the 1970's, trying to heighten the literary relevance and critical currency of feminine texts, struggled to ascertain what made a text written by a woman worthy of study. In an effort to define criteria for feminist criticism, Elaine Showalter, a pioneer in the field of Women's Studies, writes: "No theory, however suggestive, can be a substitute for the close and extensive

knowledge of women's texts which constitutes our essential subject. Cultural anthropology and social history can perhaps offer us a terminology and a diagram of women's cultural situation" ("Wilderness" 205). Using this model of criticism, Showalter proclaims, "Mrs. Gaskell became the heroine of a new school of 'motherly' fiction," and even when she published the controversial *Ruth* (1853), her own unassailable respectability and normality helped win over the readers" (*Literature* 71). Despite Showalter's opinion, Gaskell received a considerable amount of negative criticism for *Ruth* including rebukes from members of her husband's Unitarian congregation (Uglow 339). Showalter and her peers favored writers like Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot because these unmarried women appeared to be rebels challenging the dominant paradigm of their time (Davis 507). Gaskell's biographical data alone precluded her from seeming rebellious; her marital status and her dedication to motherhood resembled the conservative values of the Victorian era too much for these feminist critics' taste.

However, others saw the advantage in Gaskell's dedication to maternity. Virginia Woolf declared: "Mrs. Gaskell wields a maternal sway over her readers of her own sex; wise, witty, and very larged-minded, her readers are devoted to her as to the most admirable of mothers" (qtd. in Davis 508). Part of the issue for these second wave feminists was their own relationship with the issue of motherhood. Deanna Davis explains the dilemma: "But an investigation into the conditions of the lives of mothers can just as easily lead a daughter to want to distance herself from mothering, especially if those mothers look more like martyrs than like matriarchs" (511). She continues her analysis, "Since feminism has tended to treat motherhood

as an institution, it is not just the mother herself but also the cultural norms leading to her martyrdom that need to be rejected" (511). While Gaskell was committed to nurturing and instructing her children, she did not take a self-sacrificing approach to her maternal commitments. She was dedicated to her writing career and believed she could be a mother *and* a writer. She had a prolific career as a writer with nine novels and at least fifty-one short stories to her credit. In the early 1990's, Gaskell's work experienced something of a renaissance; scholars were interested in reviving her novels and stories and re-evaluating the texts. Gaskell found new respect among not only the feminist critics, but from other schools of criticism as well. Davis sums up Gaskell's contribution to the women's literary canon: "Gaskell cannot be relied on to break the impasse [self-care versus self-sacrifice] for us, but her work does point us back in the direction of needing to acknowledge women as individual selves with needs that sometimes conflict with the goals of nurturance" (532). Gaskell's work has now become appreciated for what it has to offer regarding the emotional, economic, and self-care needs of mothers. Gaskell did not paint an 'angel in the house' view of motherhood; she presented a realistic portrayal of mothers and daughters struggling to carve out an identity for themselves in a repressive culture dominated by patriarchal definitions of womanhood.

In the three works analyzed here – "The Poor Clare", *Ruth*, and *Lois the Witch* – all three heroines are motherless daughters. Lucy's mother died when Lucy was so young that she cannot even remember her, Ruth's mother died when Ruth was twelve, and Lois's mother died when Lois was seventeen. All three girls experience the pain of loss and struggle to create an identity for themselves that

does not include a nurturing parent. Fortunately for Lucy, she has Mrs. Clarke to care for her, but Ruth and Lois are on their own searching for compassion and understanding. The fates of these three women are different, but the painful loss and longing for their deceased mothers are ever present.

Gaskell experiments with genre in these works as well. "The Poor Clare" is a short story in which Gaskell weaves supernatural elements into the tale. The use of the supernatural allows for multiple interpretations of this story since Gaskell leaves enough space for the reader's imagination to work with the story. *Ruth* is Gaskell's social protest novel regarding the treatment of fallen women. She advocates for more compassionate understanding of the circumstances that lead to a woman's fall and she promotes the idea that a fallen woman can recover from her sin if properly guided. *Lois the Witch* is Gaskell's first attempt at writing historical fiction. The novella required her to do a considerable amount of research to accurately portray the Puritan America of 1692. In her novella, she promotes the concept of religious tolerance and acceptance of difference.

Gaskell's work is worthy of consideration because she champions individualism for women, compassion for all, and, above all, tolerance. She never paints her characters in black and white, but always in shades of grey. She wishes to emphasize that everyone has their faults, but they also have the power within themselves to overcome their faults and evolve into a better person. Gaskell is deft at representing the beliefs and practices of different faiths without judgment. She believed that the spiritual life was open to all who desired it. Though her fiction is filled with Christian concepts and Biblical references, she is not on an evangelical

mission to convert souls through her writing. As a Unitarian, she embraces the humanity of religion to guide and support her characters through difficult living conditions and, often, condemnation by dominant patriarchal codes of conduct.

The Sins of the Father: The Incestual Double in "The Poor Clare"

As a writer in the Victorian era, Elizabeth Gaskell often focused her writing on the tensions between the working class and the privileged class. As a female writer, she also focused her writing on the repression of the female voice and identity in a strict patriarchal culture. Gaskell's Unitarian beliefs led her to seek justice for those she saw as oppressed by the dominant culture. Though Gaskell expressed a fondness for telling gothic tales, her status as a Unitarian wife would have led her to seek a more rational explanation for supernatural occurrences. Her short story, "The Poor Clare," is one such gothic tale in which Gaskell does not supply a reasonable explanation for the supernatural element. Thus, she leaves this element of the story open to multiple interpretations. Gaskell's decision to employ a double as the gothic element in her story follows a literary tradition with interesting psychological implications for both the reader and the writer. Scholars have suggested that repressed Victorian sexuality, restrictive gender roles, and an inverted familial structure have been the cause for the emergence of Lucy's double. However, the text of "The Poor Clare" supports an alternative reading that an incestual relationship with Lucy's father caused a psychic split in Lucy's personality which thus engendered Lucy's ghastly doppelgänger.

"The Poor Clare" is Gaskell's gothic tale of feminine rage, revenge, and repentance. Gaskell presents the story from the retrospective point-of-view of an English lawyer involved in the business of the Fitzgerald family. He recounts the

peculiar behavior of Bridget Fitzgerald after her beloved daughter Mary abandons her for work as a governess abroad. Bridget's only comfort is Mary's spaniel; she cares for the dog as if it were her own child. One day, the dog is shot by a quarrelsome Mr. Gisborne. Bridget unleashes her grief and rage by laying a curse upon Mr. Gisborne. She softly says, "You shall live to see the creature you love best, and who alone loves you – ay, a human creature, but as innocent and fond as my poor dead darling – you shall see this creature, for whom death would be too happy, become a terror and a loathing to all, for this blood's sake" (Gaskell 59). Bridget pronounces the curse out of anguish and rage without knowing the long-term ramifications of her utterance.

Bridget's actions lead her neighbors to voice their long-held suspicions of witchery, but they are unable to convict her since she has been provided for by the owners of the manor house. Gisborne initially ignores the curse until he sees its manifestation in his daughter Lucy. Gisborne puts Lucy out of the house since he cannot bear the sight of Lucy's double. The narrator meets Lucy at this point and discovers that Lucy's mother is Bridget's daughter; thus the curse has backfired upon Bridget.

When Bridget's supernatural attempts to relieve the curse fail, she returns to her Catholic faith and joins the Order of the Poor Clares in Belgium. She believes that only true repentance and suffering will relieve Lucy of the curse. She ends up tending to the injured Gisborne who has come to Antwerp seeking to revive his military career. Bridget gives her life to her sworn enemy and the curse is thus removed from Lucy's countenance.

Gaskell touches upon many themes in "The Poor Clare" that would have been of great interest to her as a Victorian writer. She illustrates the class struggle through her depiction of Bridget Fitzgerald, a working class servant woman, and Mr. Gisborne, a wealthy military man. The tension in this relationship also demonstrates the battle between patriarchal dominion and the matriarchal desire for self-determination. Gaskell skillfully establishes the divisive mistrust that existed between Protestants and Catholics in England. Bridget's unorthodox practice of Catholicism contributes to her neighbors' assertions that she is a witch. However, the inclusion of the supernatural double puzzles and intrigues most scholars. Whether or not Gaskell intended for the double to have a figurative or literal meaning is not clear. She could have simply intended to tell a good ghost story, but her knowledge of mental illness and the dangers of spiritualism through her Unitarian religion suggests otherwise.

As the wife of a Unitarian minister, Elizabeth Gaskell would have no doubt been aware of the current concerns for the impoverished and their poor mental state. Gaskell would have been witness to the popularity of animal magnetism, electro-biology, table-turning, spirit-rapping, and other common forms of spiritualism. In the 1850s, scientific knowledge and supernatural belief pulled the population in two distinct directions. Gaskell, a rational Unitarian and a cousin of Charles Darwin, preferred to side with scientists. Louise Henson in her article, "Half Believing, Half-Incredulous': Elizabeth Gaskell, Superstition and the Victorian Mind," gives the following example of animal magnetism from Gaskell's *Cranford*:

The death of Mrs. Jamieson's dog, which 'uneducated people thought was caused by apoplexy, brought on by too much feeding and too little exercise', is attributed to the sinister presence of Signor Brunoni, who 'had apparently killed a canary with only a word of command'. (253)

Henson continues to explain Gaskell's intended effect upon her audience with the inclusion of such an example: "The ladies' anxieties about the magical and dominating power of Brunoni's will, Gaskell suggests, is proportional to the weakened state of their own will.... Many Unitarians viewed this practice with suspicion and even hostility for it undermined the essential virtue of self-control" (253). The practice of maintaining a strong mind and a tender heart is a central belief among Unitarians and Gaskell would have not only retained this belief, she would have demonstrated it through good works as well. Quite telling is the fact that Gaskell's chief concern in this passage from *Cranford* is the anxiety the belief in animal magnetism causes the ladies, not the phenomenon itself.

Similarly, weak-mindedness could account for Lucy's double in "The Poor Clare." The tale is told from the narrator's perspective and the reader must decide how faithfully he renders the tale. The narrator does not actually see Lucy's double until he has heard Lucy tell the full story of how the double came into existence. Through the idea of weak-minded suggestion, the double could merely be a figment of the narrator's imagination brought on by the superstitious beliefs of Lucy and Mrs. Clarke. Gaskell was concerned about the effect a belief in the supernatural could have on weaker minds. Henson argues, "To read Gaskell's treatment of the supernatural as a causality independent of the physical is to ignore the intellectual

and scientific thinking that informed her narratives and to detach them from the topical debate in which they participate" (267). Therefore, one must take into account the historical debate over spiritualism when analyzing Gaskell's gothic stories. Her narratives could have been intended to serve as cautionary tales, but they also reflect Victorian social structures and the patriarchal society in which they were constructed.

Gaskell presents two opposing familial structures in "The Poor Clare." Gisborne represents what should be the dominant, patriarchal, "normal" Victorian family, but his family unit is destroyed by the invocation of a curse by the head the other representational family. This family represents the inverse of the typical Victorian home—a fractured matrilineal parentage. Bridget Fitzgerald's family would have represented an abomination of Victorian values to Gaskell's audience. Thus, this quality lends itself to the unease and discomfort necessary to render the story a gothic tale. Alan Shelston, referring to both "The Old Nurse's Story" and "The Poor Clare," argues this same point: "These stories thus allow for two projections of the family: ideal, in the form of the assumed audience, and an anti-type, reflected both in the circumstances of the stories and their action" (144). The presentation of broken family units allows the intended audience to take comfort in the safety of their culturally prescribed familial structure. However, Shelston contends that Gaskell strategized through time and place setting to exploit her audiences' vulnerabilities with what they conceived of as "normal" (143). Lucy's double challenges them to consider how they assign blame to the blameless. As an audience accustomed to

reading coded texts, they would have recognized the sexual undertones represented by Lucy's dubious twin.

The consequences of repressed female sexuality were a major theme for female writers of the mid-nineteenth century and Gaskell was no exception. Feminist critics have been quick to point out the demonic characterizations of female sexuality in Victorian literature. Maureen Reddy outlines the dangers of Victorian female sexuality:

It is a frightening depiction of the consequences of expressing female sexuality in a culture that insists that all good women are sexless angels and that therefore requires women to repress their sexuality, under threat of ostracism or death. Further, it is a psychologically perceptive portrayal of the results of repression. (261)

Therefore, in this interpretation, Lucy's double represents the unnatural expression of female sexuality. This could entail anything from repressed desire to uncontrolled lust. Any expression of sexuality the patriarchy deemed unladylike was, therefore, unnatural. The "curse" of expressed sexuality must be removed before Lucy is fit for participation in Victorian society's most sacred rite—marriage. Reddy asserts that rage is embodied in Lucy's secondary figure as well: "Lucy's demonic double acts out Lucy's repressed sexuality along with her repressed rage. Whereas Lucy's looks are pure, simple, innocent, gentle, quiet, and holy, her double has a voluptuous leer, laughs strangely in a most unladylike and 'boisterous' way..." (263). Lucy's double expresses the fury of the mannered and submissive Victorian woman with unabashed vindictiveness.

Gaskell herself was all too aware of the demands of Victorian society's restricted gender roles for women. Carol Martin reports Gaskell's support of her fellow writers: "She praises Charlotte Brontë's 'womanliness' in contradiction of the common idea that she was 'a strong-minded emancipated woman' (Letter 326), and she admires Barbara Bodichon's 'noble bravery,'..." (38). Gaskell obviously felt championing women's rights a worthy cause since she signed the first petition that led to the Married Women's Property Acts (Martin 38). Therefore, "The Poor Clare" can also be read as a tragedy, a failure of society to accept an independent woman. Referring to Bridget, Martin writes, "Feeling, then, both rebellious and submissive, defiant of the world's opinion and yet fearing it, it is no wonder that Gaskell uses the possibilities of the ghost story to depict a powerful woman who dares to defy heaven and earth, but whose power turns back upon herself and makes her, once again, a victim" (38). Both Bridget and Lucy present themselves as victims of the dominant culture's restrictive roles for women. Neither woman can express her true nature in a culture that demands subservience from all of its women. Reddy sums up the predicament of the two characters well:

The witch and the demon are in fact the same being; like the female demon, the witch is a persistent literary image that is rooted in male fears of women. The very persistence of these images throughout the centuries shows the power of the terror of female sexuality, which is seen as something that must be destroyed if society is to survive. (265)

The witch must die in order to exorcise the demon she cast forth when she invoked the curse. In this scenario, all women lose; Bridget dies without any trace of the life she lived and Lucy carries the stain of her double forever.

While the witch and the demon have a long literary tradition, the double as literary device gains in popularity during Gaskell's lifetime. Reddy contends, "The story of Lucy and her double, which should be a center of interest in the story, does not get the emphasis it deserves" (261). Her contention speaks to an uneasiness Gaskell may have had either with the form or the interpretation. Lucy's double disappears from the story just as the reader's interest is piqued. Consequently, the lack of additional information leads readers to apply multiple interpretations as to the meaning of Lucy's grisly twin. Enid Duthie asserts, "Instead of being, as in Poe's *William Wilson*, evidence of a divided personality, this 'ghastly resemblance' is totally alien to the real character of the innocent victim" (141). I respectfully disagree with Duthie's assertion and I believe the historical use of the double figure by female authors supports my dissension. The female writers of the mid-nineteenth century did not exist in a vacuum; their work was profoundly influenced by the strict mores placed upon their sex. Through the use of the literary double, female authors could grapple with this duality. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar expound upon this subject in their seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic*, "Indeed, much of the poetry and fiction written by women conjures up this mad creature so that female authors can come to terms with their own uniquely female feelings of fragmentation, their own keen sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be" (78). Gaskell's invocation of the literary double could stand as a

reaction to her role as a Victorian lady. Though she was respected as a writer, she was still bound by the limitations of her sex in her subject matter according to the laws of Victorian decorum. Gilbert and Gubar further explain the importance of literary doubles:

For it is, after all, through the violence of the double that the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male texts, while at the same time it is through the double's violence that this anxious author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained. (76)

Gilbert and Gubar perfectly sum up the plot of "The Poor Clare" here. Bridget's rage and thirst for revenge lead to her destruction, but what about Lucy's rage? Bridget successfully escapes from "male houses" and retreats into her own cottage. Though Lucy is put out of Gisborne's home, she does not escape the influence contained within patriarchal houses. Does Lucy's double's retention of the "sins of the father" block her from truly being free of an unhealthy male influence?

An alternative solution to the mystery of Lucy's double is that an incestual relationship occurred between Lucy and her father Gisborne thus causing a psychic split in Lucy's personality. The split in Lucy's personality causes the dissociative "double" to emerge as a result of the abuse. Incest would cause such a traumatic injury to Lucy's psyche that she would not remember the actions of her dissociative "double". Gisborne has the convenient explanation of the manifestation of Bridget's curse for Lucy's disturbing behavior rather than bearing the responsibility for his own transgression. Lucy could never have owned what happened to her since Victorian

culture always laid blame upon the woman for sexual violations and thus her reputation would have been sullied henceforth. Cases of incest were not uncommon in the nineteenth-century, but they were rarely prosecuted, especially among the upper classes. Gaskell most certainly would have been knowledgeable of the problem of incest since, as a minister's wife, she was keenly aware of the social problems of the day. Therefore, I do not believe this interpretation to be unfounded.

Freud himself was fascinated by the concept of the literary double and its possible origins. Freud's comments on doubles in his essay "The Uncanny" lend support to the possibility that Lucy's ego has become fractured. Freud writes, "A special agency is slowly formed there [the ego's development], which is able to stand over against the rest of the ego, which has the function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind, and which we become aware of as our 'conscience'" (940). However, Lucy is unaware of the presence of her double; she has no conscious awareness of its existence until she catches a glimpse of it in the mirror. Freud explains this phenomenon:

But after having thus considered the *manifest* motivation of the figure of the 'double', we have to admit that none of this helps us to understand the extraordinary feeling of something uncanny that pervades the conception; and our knowledge of pathological mental processes enables us to add that nothing in this superficial material could account for the urge towards defence which has caused the ego to project that material outward as something foreign to itself....The

double has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons. (941)

Thus, Lucy has employed the figure of the double as a defense mechanism. She is, after all, a Victorian gentlewoman and she must maintain this appearance. The double can express the rage of incest and can act out sexually in ways that Lucy's own conception of herself simply would not permit into her conscious mind. Thus, the double protects Lucy's ego structure, but, for those that glimpse the double, she is seen as a "thing of terror."

To reach this interpretation, Gaskell manipulates language into a code when Lucy begins her narrative; she hints and nudges her readers toward a deeper meaning beyond the surface meaning of her words. Lucy's explanation of her father's proclamation of love contains a more complex meaning than the mere words suggest. She explains the most compelling scene with her father in the following passage:

And one day his tongue seemed loosened with wine, and he told me much that I had not known till then, – how dearly he had loved my mother, yet how his willful usage had caused her death; and then he went on to say how he loved me better than any creature on earth, and how, some day, he hoped to take me to foreign places, for that he could hardly bear these long absences from his only child. (76)

On the surface, this interaction may appear quite innocent, but closer examination reveals an imbalanced relationship. Gisborne has placed Lucy into the position of substitute wife and has supplanted the love reserved for a spouse onto Lucy. The

words that follow his declaration of love for his wife resemble the words reserved for courtship. Gisborne may proclaim he loved his wife dearly, but his deceitful actions led directly to her death. Mrs. Clarke relates the story to the narrator, "I have heard said that he practised some terrible deceit upon her, and when she came to know it, she was neither to have nor to hold, but rushed off from his very arms and threw herself into a rapid stream and was drowned" (Gaskell 81). Presumably, the line "neither to have nor to hold" implies that Gisborne deceived her into marriage thus causing Mary to be a 'fallen woman' in the eyes of Victorian society. Mrs. Clarke continues, "It stung him deep with remorse, but I used to think the remembrance of the mother's cruel death made him love the child yet dearer" (Gaskell 81). Or did the "mother's cruel death" lead him to substitute his daughter for his wife and take sexual liberties with her as well?

When Gisborne confronts Lucy with her "double's" fanciful behavior, she is completely baffled. She has no recollection of the events relayed by her father, but he insists she has transgressed. Lucy recounts: "...he reproached me for my undue familiarity – all unbecoming a gentlewoman – with his grooms. I had been in the stable-yard, laughing and talking, he said" (Gaskell 77). Lucy's account reveals evidence of a dissociative disorder brought on by the trauma of sexual abuse. Lucy furthers this theory with her own words, "In the great mirror opposite I saw myself, and right behind, another wicked, fearful self, so like me that my soul seemed to quiver within me, as though not knowing to which similitude of body it belonged" (Gaskell 77). Lucy recognizes the effects of the sexual abuse in the mirror and a full psychic split occurs. She does not incorporate what she sees in the mirror as a part

of herself, but rather she identifies the reflection as a completely separate entity. Lucy and her double will no longer encounter each other throughout the rest of the story. Lucy cannot bear to face her abused, wounded self so she compartmentalizes all of her painful emotions into the figure of the double. This figure takes on a life of its own and Lucy develops memory loss as to her actions when the double is in control of her body. The concept of a weaker personality temporarily supplanting the dominant personality is not foreign in the mental health field.

Today, Lucy would probably be assumed to be suffering from and receive the professional psychiatric diagnosis of Dissociative Identity Disorder. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is routinely used by health care professionals to diagnose patients and plan courses of treatment. The DSM-IV outlines four specific criteria to meet this diagnosis:

The essential feature of Dissociative Identity Disorder is the presence of two or more distinct identities or personality states (Criterion A) that recurrently take control of behavior (Criterion B). There is an inability to recall important personal information, the extent of which is too great to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness (Criterion C). The disturbance is not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance or a general medical condition (Criterion D). (DSM IV)

A closer examination of the text reveals that Lucy meets all four criteria for the diagnosis. Lucy relays the actions of her double thus meeting both Criterion A and B, "I was in my bed for days; and even while I lay there my double was seen by all,

flitting about the house and gardens, always about some mischievous or detestable work" (Gaskell 78). The passage indicates both the presence of a secondary personality and that personality's ability to control Lucy's actions without awakening her dominant personality's attention. She also meets Criterion C by her inability to recall actions attributed to her person. She feels most desperately out of control, particularly because the double's actions are hinted at as being sexual in nature. Lucy intimates that she knows the meaning of the accusations, but she is relating the story to a potential husband so she must maintain the air of Victorian propriety. She painfully recalls, "Yet my father called me by names of which I hardly know the meaning, but my heart told me they were such as shame any modest woman; and from that day he turned quite against me..." (Gaskell 77). Gisborne's accusations imply that Lucy's altered personality acts in a sexual manner unbecoming a proper Victorian lady. In the case of incest, a response that includes hypersexuality would not be unusual for Lucy to exhibit.

The narrator's reaction to Lucy's double speaks to the possibility of hypersexuality, but it also reveals his own insecurities. When he finally sees the double emerge, he cannot help but notice the sexual intensity contained within: "...a ghastly resemblance...but with a loathsome demon soul looking out of the grey eyes, that were in turns mocking and voluptuous. My heart stood still within me; every hair rose up erect; my flesh crept with horror" (Gaskell 78). He approaches the emergence of the alternate personality with both attraction and repulsion. His dual reaction could be explained by his role as a proper Victorian gentleman. He is undoubtedly sexually aroused by this alternate version of Lucy, but he is repulsed by

his improper response to a "pure and innocent woman" and he projects those negative feelings onto the ghastly double figure. He is unable to incorporate the double personality into Lucy's identity; he insists on calling the double "It". The "It" is the abused and wounded girl that fled her father's home; the "It" is the girl that suffers to be free from mental stress; the "It" is Lucy. The narrator steadfastly insists on standing by the innocent Lucy while he seeks a cure for the "It". However Mrs. Clarke's response to the narrator's assertion that "Human darkness shrinks from encounter with the powers of darkness; and, for some reason unknown to me, the pure and holy Lucy is their victim," (Gaskell 79) provides the most compelling evidence for sexual abuse. Mrs. Clarke replies, "The sins of the father shall be visited upon the children" (Gaskell 79). In this case the sins could simply mean the curse or perhaps the remark hits at the crux of Lucy's dilemma—the incest committed by her father.

Gisborne's account of the events in Lucy's life is only detailed in a letter delivered to the lawyer's office. The contents of the letter prove to be disturbing with regard to Lucy: "...when he came to speak of his daughter, the repugnance which the conduct of the demoniac creature had produced in his mind, was but ill-disguised under a show of profound indifference as to Lucy's fate. One almost felt as if he would have been as content to put her out of existence" (Gaskell 90). This is the daughter that he had earlier expressed great love for and now he completely disregards her entire existence. His desire to eliminate her from being is cruel and ruthless. He blames a "demoniac creature" for Lucy's disturbed behavior when his own actions gave birth to the demon. Gisborne is mercifully saved from death at the

end of the story by a repentant Bridget, now a Poor Clare nun, desperate to remove the curse from Lucy. Bridget's dying words proclaim that the curse is lifted, but Gaskell provides nothing but Bridget's declaration to prove that Lucy is cured; she never returns to Lucy as a character to prove that Lucy does not continue her days haunted by her dissociative double.

Gaskell includes many important thematic issues in "The Poor Clare." Her inclusion of the double proves to be the most compelling element of the story both for interpretation and gothic storytelling. Gaskell labored under the conditions of a female writer in the nineteenth-century and thus her writing was often coded. It is in this coded language that the themes of sexuality, restrictive gender roles, and even incest are found. Gaskell overcomes the restrictions of her gender through her clever use of words containing double or hidden meanings. The actions of Lucy's double, the psychic split in personality, Mrs. Clarke's responses to the narrator's questions and Gisborne's own words all point to an incestual relationship. Gaskell repeatedly refers to Lucy as an innocent victim, as well she should. Lucy's double is the direct result of Gisborne's improper displacement of marital affection onto his daughter. Unfortunately, Lucy produces an entirely new personality in order to cope with the impropriety. Gaskell proves that, through the use of the gothic tradition, taboo subjects can and must be explored by literary audiences. The ghost story device is simply an acceptable way of conveying a socially relevant message to a reluctant nineteenth-century audience.

A Fallen Motherless Daughter: The Legacy of Loss in *Ruth*

In *Ruth*, Elizabeth Gaskell seeks to reform the standard Victorian narrative of the 'fallen woman'. She uses her character Ruth Hilton as her vehicle to demonstrate didactically that a woman could not only survive her fall, but also could enact a reformation and become a contributing member of society. However, Gaskell had the daunting task of inventing a female character that her Victorian audiences could sympathize with before, during, and after the fall. Victorian novels had explored the condition of the fallen woman before, but the character was usually on the periphery of the narrative such as in *David Copperfield*. Gaskell's Ruth is situated as the main character and all of the action in the novel revolves around her. Such characters had few plot options in Victorian novels; they could be shipped away to another country or they could commit suicide. Gaskell sets up a different agenda by allowing her Ruth to live beyond her sin. Anita Wilson sums up Gaskell's purpose, "The novel is not a plea for sexual freedom; it is an appeal for understanding, tolerance, and forgiveness, combined with an active demonstration of the impossibility of Victorian expectations of women" (70). Gaskell characterizes Ruth as motherless daughter not only to demonstrate how Ruth could claim sexual innocence in her fall, but also to garner her reader's sympathies as Ruth recovers from the fall and develops into the heroine of the novel amidst patriarchal condemnation and judgment.

The fallen woman narrative is a peculiarly Victorian construct. With the moral codes regarding female behavior so strict, the fallen woman was placed in a situation from which there was no recovery. Kathleen Hickok writes: "She exemplified the woman who had failed in her vocation to guide men and uplift society. Even worse, she had violated the rigid social code of female sexual conduct, thereby endangering not only public morality, but also male property and paternity rights" (92). Therefore, the fallen woman threatens women, men, and society. The stain of their fall was to remain with these women forever and many turned to prostitution for survival while others drowned themselves to relieve themselves of their shame.

In *Ruth*, Gaskell seeks to subvert the common narrative and compose a new one for the fallen woman, which includes redemption and reintegration back into society through good works. First, Gaskell situates Ruth as the main focus of the novel. Suzann Bick notes: "Yet at the most basic level, Ruth differs significantly from the fallen woman in the majority of the nineteenth-century novels because she is not a spectral figure or a secondary character – but the heroine" (18). Gaskell takes a significant risk in publishing such a novel in 1853. Gaskell sought to challenge the society's condemnation of fallen women, and her Unitarian beliefs guided her to instruct her readers to see Ruth's humanity beyond her fall. Susan Morgan explores this idea further:

Ruth is a novel about redemption and the transforming power of time.

The subject of a fallen woman is an expressive vehicle for examining the active relations between character and event, which constitute a

personal history, because the whole notion of fallen women assumes one's status is fixed, that there is no personal history, just an endless repetition of that one defining event. One can lose one's virginity only once, one can fall only once, and, thereafter, at least in this life, is forever fallen. (47)

Gaskell seeks to remove the "forever fallen" notion from the narrative; she believes that the power of spiritual instruction and honest intentions can save a woman from permanent fallenness. Siv Jansson affirms Gaskell's choice, "Gaskell's radicalism lies, initially, in making a fallen woman the centre of her text, and most significantly, in using the fallen woman to force the Victorian public to acknowledge the paradox of the ideal they deified" (67). At the time Gaskell published *Ruth*, the dominant instructional narrative that guided women's behavior was the 'angel in the house' metaphor. Women could not possibly live up to standards of this domestic idealization, which included passivity, grace, meekness, piety, and most importantly, purity (Melani). Gaskell invests her story with Ruth's personal history to show her readers how an innocent, motherless girl could easily be seduced into such a state. Understanding Ruth's history is the key to understanding Ruth's transformation.

The novel opens with Ruth returning from an errand to Mrs. Mason's dressmaking shop at two o'clock in the morning. Ruth's history is revealed through narration; she is orphaned and has been apprenticed to the shop by her guardian. Her delicate, lady-like mother died when Ruth was twelve and her father died when she was fifteen. Ruth's mother suffered a prolonged illness, which would explain Ruth's ignorance on many matters concerning society. In addition, Ruth's status as

a motherless daughter endows her with certain characteristics unique to girls who have lost their mothers so young. Though daughters without mothers were not uncommon in the Victorian era, present day studies have revealed characteristics that Ruth would likely have had. In her groundbreaking work, *Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss*, Hope Edelman describes several conditions that are pertinent in Ruth's case. She explains, "Among children of all ages, the critical factor determining later distress is not mother loss per se but instead the availability of consistent, loving, and supportive care afterwards" (35). Ruth searches through a series of possible surrogate mother figures during the first part of the novel. Not until she finds the Bensons (or they find her), does Ruth experience a stable home environment after the death of her mother. Most importantly, Edelman explains the impact of losing a mother on a girl's social gender development: "A girl who loses her mother or mother-figure has little readily available, concrete evidence of the adult feminine to draw from. She has neither a direct guide for sex-typed behavior nor an immediate connection to her own gender" (178). Edelman continues, "She's looking for clues that will tell her how to be a girl and trying to create a feminine identity through observation and mimicry after her natural window to adult experience has been shut" (178). Edelman's analysis explains Ruth's social difficulties through much of the novel. She has no idea how to be a proper Victorian lady; she was too young to be morally indoctrinated by her mother with the codes that guided female Victorian behavior. Prior to his own death, her father was in such a terrible state of mourning that he also gave her no moral guidance. Thus, Ruth, at

fifteen, enters into the Victorian laboring class as “a sheep among the wolves” (King James Bible Matthew 10:16).

Similarly, in “Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman,” Adrienne Rich analyzes *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of Jane's motherless state. However, Jane and Ruth differ on many levels; Jane is spirited and determined while Ruth is distracted and flighty. Ignorant and naïve, Ruth is seduced and falls; while Jane is tempted to fall, she is disturbed by the inconsistencies in Rochester's story and demands to know the truth; thus she escapes with her virtue intact. Rich articulates the main difference between these two characters:

Jane Eyre, motherless, and economically powerless, undergoes certain female temptations, and finds that each temptation presents itself along with an alternative – the image of a nurturing or principled or spirited woman on whom she can model herself, or to whom she can look for support. (91)

Prior to her meeting the Bensons, no woman of character was available to Ruth for support, nurturance or a model for good behavior. Ruth does not have a Miss Temple or a Helen Burns to inspire her spirit; Jane's moral structure is already in place when Rochester tries to tempt her into an illicit marriage. Rich affirms Jane's development: “she is now in touch with the matriarchal aspect of her psyche which now warns and protects her against that which threatens her integrity” (102). Ruth, still just a girl, has not had a chance to develop an internal warning system when Bellingham whisks her off to London; she has had no formal schooling or moral education. Ruth corrects her own educational neglect by asking Mr. Benson to

instruct her for the sake of her child. Jane's development comes from scrutinizing her thoughts and actions and her determination to remain true to herself. Contrarily, Ruth's acts are initially capricious and then after her fall, she labors in service to God and repentance. Both women adopt different strategies for coping with mother loss; Jane's approach is the most stoical and practical whereas Ruth's early strategy, if not corrected, would have shortened her life. Rich sums up, "In *Jane Eyre*, moreover, we find an alternative to the stereotypical rivalry of women; we see women in real and supportive relationship to each other, not simply as points on a triangle or as temporary substitutes for men" (106). Ruth desperately needs a community of women to guide her, but the sad and lonely Ruth does not find any female compassion until after her fall.

In order to depict the harsh conditions of Ruth's work situation, Gaskell documents the life of a seamstress's apprentice with stark realism. The girls worked long hours and were scarcely provided for. Gaskell describes the working conditions: "Two o'clock in the morning chimed forth the old bells of St. Saviour's. And yet more than a dozen girls still sat in the room into which Ruth entered, stitching away as if for very life, not daring to gape, or show any outward manifestations of sleepiness" (7). Thus, Gaskell immediately places Ruth among the crude working conditions at Mrs. Mason's. Since Gaskell begins the action in media res, Ruth's initial arrival at Mrs. Mason's is not described, but one can imagine the shock she must have felt moving from the pastoral farm to board and work in a seamstress shop. If Mrs. Mason had been a more comforting figure, she could have served as a surrogate mother for Ruth. Instead, Mrs. Mason is portrayed

as a hard-driving taskmaster, always looking forward to the finished product and in competition with the other dress shops. Gaskell describes Mrs. Mason:

She seemed to have risen with the determination of putting the world and all it contained (her world, at least) to rights before night; and abuses and negligences, which had long passed unproved, or winked at, were to-day to be dragged to light, and sharply reprimanded. Nothing less than perfection would satisfy Mrs. Mason at such times. (19)

She treats her young apprentices more like automatons than living girls. Siv Jansson explores Mrs. Mason's business ethics: "Mrs. Mason's determination to use Ruth's beauty as a method to promote her own business is a self-interested act, working directly against the image of selflessness which was contained within the 'angel' mother: therefore, Ruth cannot expect any moral guidance or support from this direction" (68). Though several of the girls are without family or too far from family, Mrs. Mason refuses to offer any moral counsel to her young charges, only harsh critiques on the work and slovenly habits brought about by ignorance and poverty.

In this mood, Mrs. Mason reproaches Ruth, "Whenever things are mislaid, I know it has been Ruth Hilton's evening for siding away!" (Gaskell 20). Ruth cannot possibly turn to Mrs. Mason for maternal comfort and love because she simply fears the woman. She is eager to please her, but she is not particularly dedicated to becoming a seamstress. She is so young and so easily distracted (she often finds herself lost in the beauty of the painted panels near her workstation) that she simply

cannot focus on her work. And, to Mrs. Mason, Ruth has no other purpose but to work; she is void of any sympathies for the girl; Ruth must find affection elsewhere.

Ruth finds solace in her fellow worker Jenny; she is the only girl Ruth has a recognizable relationship with in the shop. Ruth shares her past and her sorrow with Jenny, though her responses do not evoke understanding. Edelman writes:

Most adolescents transfer much of the energy they once invested in their parents to their peers or a "best friend" so common at this time. But because adolescents have little experience with profound loss, a girl's peers often are unable to validate her feelings, or to understand the magnitude of her loss. (50)

Ruth attaches quickly to Jenny and assigns the role of "best friend" to her, but Jenny cannot comfort Ruth satisfactorily when Ruth shares her sorrows, especially the loss of her mother. Gaskell describes Ruth relating her past enjoyment of the winter weather to Jenny, "...and when I was once out, I could hardly find it in my heart to come in, even to mother sitting by the fire -- even to mother,' she added, in a low, melancholy tone, which had something of inexpressible sadness in it" (8-9). Jenny does not share Ruth's enjoyment of winter (since it aggravates her cough), nor does she understand Ruth's sadness, but she tries to be a good friend. Gaskell notes Jenny's response: "But she put her arm around Ruth's neck, and stood by her; glad that the orphan apprentice, who was not yet inured to the hardship of a dressmaker's workroom, should find so much to give her pleasure in such a common occurrence as a frosty night" (9). Jenny takes Ruth on as if she were her younger sister. Unfortunately, when Ruth needs Jenny's counsel most, she falls ill

and her mother arrives to remove Jenny from work and nurse her back to health at home. Ruth is falling for the advances of Mr. Bellingham and, at this moment, she desperately needs female advice, but again, she finds herself absent of any female companionship.

When Mr. Bellingham enters Ruth's life, she feels a rush of new and unfamiliar feelings. Ruth is not a worldly character; she has no knowledge of the barriers regarding class distinctions, she is ignorant regarding social customs, and she has never been taught the rules regarding male/female-courting rituals. Coral Lansbury writes:

As the only child of a stupid old farmer and an ineffectual but amiable curate's daughter, Ruth was brought up to be a lady without the means to enable her to maintain that station. When her parents die, she is thrown upon the world to make her own living. Now, had she been quick-witted she would have made her beauty her fortune, but beauty coupled with extreme poverty, make her a predestined victim. (26)

Therefore, Ruth's beauty combined with her ignorance places her in the precarious position to be taken advantage of by Mr. Bellingham. Plus, Ruth's status as a motherless daughter adds to Ruth's inability to understand Mr. Bellingham's true intentions. Throughout their secretive courtship, no one tells Ruth that he desires an affair, not marriage. The only warning Ruth receives comes from old Thomas after he visits with Ruth and Mr. Bellingham: "My dear, remember the devil goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, remember that, Ruth" (Gaskell 45). Ruth is too caught up in her feelings for Mr. Bellingham to decipher the cryptic

Biblical warning from old Thomas. She needs someone to speak to her plainly about the situation and warn her about Mr. Bellingham's sexual intentions. Normally that person would be her mother, but without a mother or mother-substitute, Ruth attaches herself to the affections of Mr. Bellingham. She does intuit that something may not be right about her dalliance with Mr. Bellingham, but she has no one with whom she can check her misgivings.

Ruth's first fall is not sexual but financial. As she and Bellingham are returning from visiting her old home, Mrs. Mason happens to be passing by in a carriage and spies the couple, arm in arm. Just the subtle suggestion of prostitution is enough for Ruth to lose her job and she knows this fact when she sees Mrs. Mason. Gaskell describes the situation:

Mrs. Mason was careless about the circumstances of temptation into which the girls entrusted to her as apprentices were thrown, but severely intolerant if their conduct was in any degree influenced by the force of these temptations. She called this intolerance 'keeping up the character of her establishment'. (48)

And Gaskell adds the admonishment, "It would have been a better and more Christian thing, if she had kept up the character of her girls by tender vigilance and maternal care" (48). Mrs. Mason's cruel rejection of Ruth leaves her without an income and homeless. Then Bellingham informs her that he must leave for London; Ruth is thoroughly crushed and in total fear of being destitute and abandoned. Gaskell articulates Ruth's situation, "She wept afresh, giving herself up to the desolate feeling of sorrow, which absorbed all the terror she had been experiencing

at the idea of Mrs. Mason's anger" (49). Ruth knows that she cannot return to work because, in Mrs. Mason's view, she has publicly shamed the reputation of the shop. Ruth is aware that just the appearance of impropriety amounts to enough evidence to find her guilty, so she wisely refrains from blurting out a defense.

Thus in a state of complete distress, Ruth is financially unable to reject Bellingham's offer to journey with him to London. Through his expression of love for her, he clearly concedes that he is not offering her charity, but Ruth's dependence and ignorance do not permit her to fully understand the implications of the offer. Ruth does think of an alternative to surrendering herself to Bellingham; she believes that she could live with old Thomas and Mary and her solution seems viable until her inability to comprehend the financial world acts as a barrier. She has drunk a cup of tea to settle her nerves and she does not have the money to pay for it. She fears the landlord at the door will scold her if she explains that Mr. Bellingham will arrive shortly and pay for the tea. She is too inexperienced in the world to consider bartering for the tea or to explain her case to the landlord. She is trapped by ignorance and circumstance yet again. She even tries to instruct Bellingham to take her to old Thomas, but he is determined to take her to London and thus, she falls.

In many fallen women narratives, the woman is raped or tricked into a false marriage, but Ruth knew to some degree the circumstances that Mr. Bellingham was offering her. Gaskell does not shy away from indicating that sex was a pleasurable experience for Ruth. Flowers typically stand in as metaphors for sex or sexual desire. After Ruth first meets Bellingham she dreams, "He presented flower after flower to her in that baseless morning dream, which was all too quickly ended"

(Gaskell 19). After they have become lovers, he adorns her hair with flowers as she gazes lovingly into his concentrated face. Gaskell is also clever when she wishes to indicate that sex has taken place:

Her beauty was all that Mr. Bellingham cared for, and it was supreme. It was all he recognised of her, and he was proud of it. She stood in her white dress against the trees which grew around; her face was flushed into a brilliancy of colour which resembled that of a rose in June; the great heavy white flowers dropped on either side of her beautiful head, and if her brown hair was a little disordered, the very disorder only seemed to add a grace. (64)

Gaskell not only writes a beautiful post-coital scene here, but she also depicts Bellingham's vapid feelings for Ruth. She is only a plaything or an object to him; he admires her the way one admires a Ming vase or a Fabergé egg. His feelings have no real substance to them while Ruth, so young and inexperienced, believes that she is in love with him in spite of Bellingham's petty and disagreeable behavior. Ruth wishes to invalidate her growing awareness of his demanding and cynical character; she only wants to see the handsome gentleman she fell in love with not the peckish, overprivileged snob he really is.

Ruth does not comprehend the full consequences of her actions until she begins to feel her own maternal stirrings. As Ruth waits for Bellingham to emerge from his chambers, she takes a short walk and she spies a small child, a boy, and his nurse. Ruth is naturally drawn to the baby, but she receives a reproach from the boy. Gaskell draws the scene:

Her [the baby's] fresh, soft, peach complexion was really tempting; and Ruth, who was always fond of children, went up to coo and to smile at the little thing, and after some 'peep-booing', she was about to snatch a kiss, when Harry [the boy], whose face had been reddening ever since the play began, lifted up his sturdy little right arm and hit Ruth a great blow on the face. (62)

Harry explains his actions: "She's not a lady", he said indignantly. 'She's a bad, naughty girl – mamma said so, she did; and she sha'nt kiss our baby" (Gaskell 62). Ruth is alarmed to be chastened by a child; and his condemnation is a shock to her. Her mood darkens, much to the displeasure of Bellingham, and she resolves to be more cheerful for his sake. He is still all she has to sustain her and as her only human connection to the world, he provides an emotional core for her being. When Bellingham falls ill, Ruth's emotional core begins to dismantle.

Initially, Ruth is still able to hold herself together playing the role of Bellingham's nursemaid. But with the arrival of Bellingham's forceful mother, Ruth believes she is pushed out of her lover's life for good. Ruth hopes in vain that once Bellingham recovers, he will send for her and they will romantically reunite. However, she is ignorant of Bellingham's mother's intentions of blotting out the affair from Henry's life. When Bellingham and his mother depart, Ruth desperately runs after the carriage. Gaskell describes the scene: "Ruth struggled up to the very top and stood on the bare table of moor, brown and purple, stretching far away till it was lost in the haze of summer afternoon; the white road was all flat before her, but the carriage she sought and the figure disappeared" (79-80). Yet again, Ruth is

abandoned and alone, purposeless and ill-equipped to fend for herself in a world she barely understands. This knowledge proves to be too overwhelming for Ruth and she runs wildly into the moors toward the river, presumably to end her own life; only her compassion for others prevents her from committing suicide. Mr. Benson, in spite of his disabled condition, runs after Ruth when she appears to be close to ending her own life. He falls and lets out a cry of pain that echoes throughout the moors. Ruth cannot in good conscience leave the sweet-natured, hunchbacked man in desperate pain so far from the inn. She stoops to help him to his feet and assists him back to their lodgings. Through their mutual distress, Ruth confides in Mr. Benson and tells him of her abandoned condition. Metaphorically, one man's physical fall saves a woman from ending her life because of a moral fall.

Despite Benson's accidental (on purpose) intervention, Ruth falls into a catatonic, death-like state at the loss of her lover. She has invested all of her emotions, hopes, and dreams in just one person and, without him, her sense of self is a blank slate. Nothing can revive her from this state until she receives word that she is about to become a mother. Faith Benson relays the news to her brother:

After the doctor was gone, she pulled the bed curtain aside, and looked as if she wanted to speak to me. (I can't think how she heard, for we were close to the window, and spoke very low.) Well, I went to her, though I really had taken quite a turn against her. And she whispered quite eagerly, "Did he say I should have a baby?" Of course, I could not keep it from her; but I thought it my duty to look as cold and severe as I could. (Gaskell 99)

Faith then applies her Victorian judgment to the case, "She did not seem to understand how it ought to be viewed, but took it just as if she had a right to have a baby. She said, "Oh my God, I thank Thee! Oh, I will be so good!" I had no patience with her then, so I left the room" (Gaskell 99). This exchange indicates two important shifts in Ruth's life. First, Ruth's pregnancy has given her not only a reason to live, but a new identity as a mother. Also, Faith's efforts to correct Ruth's reaction foreshadow the guidance and surrogate parentage that Ruth will receive from the Bensons. This moment illustrates the turning point in Ruth's development and future rehabilitation. Henceforth, Ruth will focus on atoning for the sexual sin she committed in ignorance.

One of the first lessons Ruth must learn is that she must accept instruction if she is to become the mother she wishes to be. Sally initially treats Ruth harshly because of her forced compliance in the Bensons' duplicitous plot to pass Ruth off as a widow; she violently cuts off Ruth's hair to complete the widow disguise. The act is tantamount to a female castration as punishment for her fall (notably Ruth will never have sex again). Eventually, Ruth's penitent silence and shy requests win Sally over and she starts acting as Ruth's instructor in the ways of motherhood. In "And God Will Teach Her": Consciousness and Character in *Ruth* and *Aurora Leigh*," Gottlieb writes, "Gaskell's emphasis on pleasure/pain learning shows up in Ruth's childish ideas of motherhood and her need for instruction" (69). She continues, "Ruth's response to motherhood is, accordingly childlike and hedonistic; she anticipates it as 'a strange, new delicious prospect', like some exotic flower or charming view" (71). As a motherless daughter and an only child, Ruth never

observed her own mother dispensing maternal care and discipline; therefore, she needs instruction from others like Sally, who can not only teach her the basics of infant care, but also give her the self-confidence to view herself as a competent mother.

Today more professional help is available to mothers in Ruth's situation. Psychiatrists and psychologists preside over studies to better understand the psychological and parenting needs of women who were raised without mothers. In a study researched and published in 2002 by faculty at Johnson State College, Vermont entitled, "Maternal Identity Among Motherless Mothers and Psychological Symptoms in Their Firstborn Children," the research group found, "Motherless women in the present study, compared to women in the control group, appeared to have a more difficult time assimilating the role of mother into their identities and were more likely to use negative descriptions of themselves as mothers (e.g. hard vs. soft, dangerous vs. safer)" (Mireault, Thomas, and Bearor 295). Ruth demonstrates a lack of confidence in her mothering skills when she continually cries over the baby while nursing him. Sally scolds Ruth when she lets her tears fall upon his face: "My bonny boy! are they letting the salt tears drop on thy sweet face before thou'rt weaned! Little somebody knows how to be a mother – I could make a better one myself [Sally dances with the baby]....Anyone but a child like thee would have known better than to bring ill-luck on the babby by letting tears fall on its face before it was weaned" (Gaskell 145). Ruth takes back the child and mimics the play with the curtain tassels that Sally had initiated with the baby. Ruth is learning to be less self-focused and more other-focused.

Ruth's later request of Mr. Benson to become educated indicates another step toward maternal responsibility. Ruth does not seek education to advance herself in society, but instead, she recognizes her deficiency in being able to educate her own son. The unexpected result of Ruth's unrelenting pursuit of a scholarly education is the offer of employment as a governess by Mr. Bradshaw. Though Ruth and the Bensons discuss the risk of their concealment of Ruth's true identity coming to light, they collectively decide that Ruth should take the position. Ruth now transitions from the private care of her own child to the semi-private care of the children of a prominent member of the community.

Ruth attends to the Bradshaw children as if they were own, though she is always aware of her position as governess. Her affections for Mary and Elizabeth are most evident when they are alone at Abermouth. Unbeknownst to Ruth, their isolation at Abermouth will be temporary and her resolve to demonstrate how she has changed for the better will be sorely tested. Mr. Bradshaw arrives with a number of male guests to discuss the upcoming election and to prepare their chosen candidate, Mr. Donne. However, Mr. Donne is the same Mr. Bellingham who deserted her years earlier in Wales and Ruth's passions are tempted while her reason begins to dissolve back into ignorance. She laments: "What am I thinking of? Where am I? I who have been praying these years and years to be worthy to be Leonard's mother. My God! What a depth of sin is in my heart! Why, the old time would be as white as snow to what it would be now, if I sought him out and prayed for the explanation that would re-establish him in my heart!" (Gaskell 225). As Ruth struggles with her mixed emotions, she opens the window and surrenders herself to

the violent storm raging outside. Ruth's perturbation is interrupted by Elizabeth's frightened knock at the door; her fear of the violent thunderstorm has driven her to seek out comfort in Ruth's arms. Gaskell writes, "To soothe her, Ruth made a great effort; and spoke of Leonard and his fears, and, in a low hesitating voice, she spoke of God's tender mercy, but very humbly, for she feared lest Elizabeth should think her better and holier than she was" (227). Ruth's motherly instincts rescue her from making the wrong choice when she unexpectedly encounters Mr. Bellingham a second time. Elizabeth reminds her of her duty to Leonard and her duty to the Bradshaw girls; her actions have resonant consequences that affect her community now. In spite of Mr. Bellingham's pleas, she will not relinquish her determination to raise Leonard on her own.

Her resolve is tested mightily when Mr. Bradshaw learns the truth behind Ruth's past. He thought he had hired the widowed Mrs. Denbigh to care for his children, but he discovers that instead, he hired the fallen Ruth Hilton. He severely chastises Ruth for her past mistakes and painfully reminds her that her sin will be borne by Leonard as he is now revealed to be a bastard. Ruth chooses to confess the deception to her son and disclose to him the true nature of his birth. Her words are disturbing to him:

The punishment of punishments lies awaiting me still. It is to see you suffer from my wrongdoing. Yes darling! they will speak shameful things of you, poor innocent child! as well as of me, who am guilty. They will throw it in your teeth through life, that your mother was never married – was not married when you were born – (Gaskell 282)

Ruth presents the grave state of bastardism so explicitly that Leonard falls into a state of melancholia and he is so terribly fearful of public scorn that when he must run an errand, he skulks about in the street with his head held down in shame.

Gaskell explains the state of Leonard's situation: "Children bear any moderate degree of poverty and privation cheerfully; but, in addition to a good deal of this, Leonard had to bear a sense of disgrace attaching to him and to the creature he loved best; this it was that took out of him the buoyancy and natural gladness of youth..." (Gaskell 315). Others try to intercede on Leonard's behalf by offering to send him to school, but Ruth will not allow her son to be away from her side. Her devotedness borders on obsessive motherly love, but she still fears that Mr.

Bellingham will somehow manipulate his way into Leonard's life and she cringes at the thought of her former lover's bad influence. Unfortunately, Ruth's immediate psychological and economic needs are pressing and she is not fully aware of the magnitude of Leonard's depression.

Very few job opportunities are open to Ruth after her status as a fallen woman is disclosed. She accepts the position of a sick nurse since very little else is open to her. Prior to Florence Nightingale's structured organization of the profession, nursing was viewed as a lowly occupation. Victorians were repulsed by the physicality of disease and the sights and smells of a dying body; a sense of impropriety was assigned to those who cared for the afflicted. Therefore, tending to the care of Ecclestone's poor diseased and dying citizens is not a highly sought after position. However, Ruth bears the job well as Gaskell notes:

At first, too, there was a recoil from many circumstances, which impressed upon her the most fully the physical sufferings of those whom she tended. But she tried to lose the sense of these – or rather to lessen them, and make them take their appointed places – in thinking of the individuals themselves, as separate from their decaying frames; and all along she had enough self-command to control herself from expressing any sign of repugnance. (320)

Ruth has now moved from the motherly care of her own son and the Bradshaw children to caring for the sick and dying. Her maternal instincts and compassion have moved beyond the private and semi-private spheres to the public arena. Nowhere is this more evident than when she volunteers to nurse in the typhus ward at the Infirmary. Ruth's benevolent actions on the ward become legendary in Ecclestone. An old woman recounts her story as Leonard listens: "It was but last night she kept my child quiet with singing psalms the night through. Low and sweet, low and sweet, they tell me – till many poor things were hushed, though they were out of their minds and had not heard psalms this many a year" (Gaskell 352). This account leads Leonard to proclaim, "She is my mother" (Gaskell 352). Ruth now holds the position of mother eternal as she is reclaimed by the community.

Remarkably, Ruth survives the typhus ward and returns to her family (the Bensons no longer seem like surrogates now). Leonard holds his head higher in the community knowing that his mother possesses the healing gifts as the nurturing mother to the public. All seems to be going well for Ruth until she decides to return to the private world of emotion. Ruth, with the reluctant approval of Mr. Davis, the

town doctor, decides to nurse Mr. Bellingham back from typhus fever. With her previous patients, Ruth was always able to see past the disease and recognize them as benevolent individuals; however, Ruth knows Bellingham's past and is a part of it and she cannot mentally prepare a defense against it. Ruth feels assaulted when Bellingham cries out, "Where are the water lilies? Where are the lilies in her hair?" (Gaskell 364) just as the fever leaves him. With his words of remembrance, Ruth is now infected and will not recover.

Gaskell's decision to kill off her heroine caused and still causes considerable debate among readers. Charlotte Brontë vehemently protested the necessity of Ruth's death as well as Elizabeth Barrett Browning (Ohno 16). However, Gaskell writes Ruth's death scene exactly as she wants it done and she stands by her decision. For Ruth, death comes to her like the unwinding of time. She lies dying in the attic room in which she gave birth to Leonard as well as told him the true story of his conception. From there she returns to childhood, not recognizing any of her caregivers; she is back with her mother singing childish ditties (Gaskell 366). She has finally rejoined her mother and now she is happy and at peace. In the context of recognizing Ruth as a motherless daughter, returning to her mother in death is consistent with the text. Jansson agrees with this interpretation: "Ruth sings on her death bed; the art taught to her by her mother, which she had lost when that idealised mother died, is returned to her not only because she is allowed to return to child-like innocence, but also because it is important that Gaskell aligns Ruth with her mother at this point" (Jansson 74). Ruth's spirit has been cleansed and her

spiritual debts have been paid so she will now assuredly be reunited with her beloved mother.

Ruth's death leaves Leonard in a precarious position. He is initially distraught and inconsolable over his mother's death. He can envision no future for himself without his mother. He is now a motherless son at the precise age that Ruth was left a motherless daughter. Maxine Harris quotes C.S. Lewis on the difficulty of early parental death:

For us boys the real bereavement happened before our mother died. We lost her gradually as she was gradually withdrawn from our life into the hands of nurses and delirium and morphia, and as our whole existence changed into something alien and menacing, as the house became full of strange smells and midnight noises and sinister whispered conversations. (qtd. in Harris 26)

Lewis's words strangely echo Leonard's likely experience with his mother's death. The Bensons, the doctors, and Sally were all too occupied with making Ruth comfortable and keeping the deathwatch to be too concerned with Leonard's psychological health. However, they all come to Leonard's aid and try to assuage his fears of life without mother. Undoubtedly, Leonard experiences that nagging question concerning his future without his mother: 'what will become of me?' Leonard will need constant reassurance and guidance to go through the grieving process. As Gaskell herself knew, a child never fully recovers from the loss of a mother. Jenny Uglow relays a letter Gaskell wrote to the Unitarian minister George Hope when she was approximately forty:

I will not let an hour pass, my dear sir, without acknowledging your kindness in sending me my dear mother's letters, the only relics of her that I have, and of more value to me than I can express, for I have so often longed for some little thing that had once been hers or touched by her. I think no one but one so unfortunate as to be early motherless can enter into the craving one has after the lost mother. (19)

Leonard will experience that craving for his mother the rest of his life. How he chooses to cope with her loss will ultimately be left up to him. Leonard is not abandoned; Mr. Davis has proposed an adoption and an apprenticeship for Leonard. He also has Thurston and Faith Benson and their servant Sally who have all cared for him since birth. Wilson notes, "In *Ruth*, Gaskell encourages a revisioning of possibilities for parents, children, and families, which incorporates and transcends the specific issue of illegitimacy" (108). Gaskell may have intended to write a social problem novel about fallen women, but she ultimately writes a book that advocates for the different familial configurations, including relatives and non-relatives. In the long term, Leonard's psychological outlook appears to be good, precisely because he has a network of men and women invested in his proper upbringing; a network, he will always remember, brought together by his mother's kindness.

Ruth's status as a motherless daughter informs many of her poor choices early in the novel. Chief among them is the spontaneous decision to accompany Bellingham to London and on to Wales as his mistress. Ruth's ignorance of the world can be explained by her lack of motherly guidance. During her early teenage years, she did not have a mother figure to instruct her on how to behave properly in

a Victorian society. Ruth's saving grace is her chance meeting with Mr. Benson and, consequently, his sister Faith. Ruth's pregnancy gives her not only a reason to live, but also a reason to reform. Ruth enacts a spiritual transformation in character in order to be worthy of the maternal role. She expands the motherly role into the realm of employment as a governess and a sick nurse. Ruth achieves near Madonna-like status with her heroic accomplishments on the typhus ward thus establishing a respectable role for herself in the community after her fallen status has become well known. Though Ruth dies in the end, Gaskell succeeds in proving that a fallen woman can recover her reputation and become not only a contributing member of society, but a valued and necessary member of the community. Sadly, Leonard is left motherless and he will never be able to fill his mother's void; hopefully, with the proper guidance from his adoptive parents and the Bensons, Leonard will recover from her loss and stake his rightful place in the community, remembering to put his mother's teachings into practice.

Gaskell places a lot of faith in the Ecclestone's male community to do right by Leonard. Unfortunately, the Victorian public's reception of *Ruth* was not quite ready to forgive a woman who is ignorantly seduced into sin and bares a bastard child. The controversy generated by the publication of *Ruth* demonstrates just how entrenched the patriarchal codes of conduct for preserving the virtue of women (notably not men) were deeply entrenched in the Victorian mind.

Persecuting the Other in *Lois the Witch*

As a Victorian writer, Elizabeth Gaskell often favored experimenting with genre. Most often her experiments were executed in her short stories and her novellas. *Lois the Witch* first appeared in 1859 in three installments in Charles Dickens' newly established magazine *All the Year Round* (Wynne 85). Positioned alongside Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, the two works of historical fiction complemented each other well (Wynne 85). *Lois the Witch* demonstrates Elizabeth Gaskell's long held interest in writing about the 1692 outbreak of witch hysteria in Salem, Massachusetts. Her early works (1840) were published under the name Cotton Mather Mills. Cotton Mather, the prominent American Puritan minister, played an instrumental role, through his writings and sermons, in the persecution of the Salem witches (Uglow 172). As a Unitarian, Gaskell had no doubt read Cotton Mather's work since the tenets of her faith advocated open access to God's word for all citizens and rejected faith-based elitism. Cotton Mather's work would have served as a primer on how not to instruct a congregation. Still, the Puritans' predeterministic beliefs held some fascination for Gaskell. As an active Victorian woman writer, she knew she would not have been able to abide by the strict dogma that severely limited the lives of seventeenth-century women. Gaskell enacts her fears of living in a restrictive culture through the character of the English orphan Lois Barclay. Lois arrives in Salem at a time of patriarchal disruption; the community is fractured over their choice for spiritual leadership. For Lois, an Anglican minister's daughter, the Puritan codes of self-censorship, the work-ethic, and the grim spiritual outlook are bewildering. Lois's natural good looks and cheerful outlook are

anathema to her Puritan relatives. Lois's desire to forge a friendship bond within the Hickson household reflects her need for basic human attachment, especially in a foreign environment; but, she fails to realize until too late that the dysfunctional and detached Hicksons represent the delusional practices and customs of the community at large; a patriarchal theocracy determined to root out aberrant behavior.

In the novella *Lois the Witch*, Gaskell tells the story of the young, orphaned Lois Barclay. As a minister's daughter, no inheritance was available to her and she was forced to find kin to care for her. The Lucy family is the only family in Barford able to take Lois in, but Miller Lucy wants to discourage his son's growing attachment to Lois and an offer is not made. Lois must travel to Salem to find her nearest relative, Uncle Hickson. Her arrival in Salem is met with trepidation and suspicion by her aunt. She immediately falls into disfavor with her Aunt Grace during an argument over religion. The Hicksons are staunch Puritans while Lois is loyal to her Anglican upbringing. She desperately tries to find favor with her cousins, but they each present a barrier to her that cannot be removed. Young Prudence is mean-spirited and spiteful, Manasseh initially seems fine but his mental disturbances quickly become apparent, and Faith appears to be her friend until she lapses into jealous rages against Lois. Manasseh doggedly pursues a marriage with Lois after Uncle Hickson dies; he tells Lois that he has heard a voice commanding him to marry her. Lois persists in her refusals, but Manasseh will not relent until she agrees.

In this claustrophobic climate, the community-at-large experiences an outbreak of bewitchings. The senior pastor's daughters have begun convulsing and contorting and finally one of them names the family servant Hota as her tormenter. The Indian woman is hanged after her confession. Prudence has taken notice of the attention that a bewitching can bring a young girl and she accuses Lois of witchcraft.

Lois has told old folk tales of English Hallowe'en that involve the divination of future husbands, but she is far from a witch. Lois is baffled at the accusation while the public begins to turn on her with malevolent intent. Then Manasseh, in an effort to save Lois, unwittingly commits blasphemy by spinning a logic that makes sense only to him. Panicked, Grace accuses Lois of bewitching her son. With two familial accusations against her, Lois is taken to jail to await trial. She experiences a strange dissolution of self while in prison. She begins to wonder if, since the ministers believe she is a witch, perhaps she really has committed some acts that have unwittingly put her in league with the devil; but her reverie is broken by the reality of her chains. The trial is shown to be a farce as Lois performs acts that witches are supposed to be unable to accomplish, such as reciting the Lord's Prayer. These pieces of evidence are brushed aside in favor of Prudence's unrelenting accusations and Lois is sentenced to death. Lois refuses to lie her way into a faulty confession to save her life despite the pastor's pleas.

When the Hicksons' Indian servant Nattee is thrown in the cell with her, Lois comforts the poor, frightened woman. In the morning, the two are led to the gallows and hanged as witches. Lois's swinging body seems to awaken a sense of responsibility in the community and the hysteria ceases. Years later a document

professing accountability and sincere atonement is drawn up and the community members most directly involved in the witch trials all sign it. Justice Sewall, one of the most involved inquisitors, decides to set aside a day for remembrance and repentant prayer for his part in the trials. In spite of his anger, Hugh Lucy, Lois's intended in England, decides to join the judge in this action to honor the memory of Lois.

In order for Gaskell to write *Lois the Witch*, she had to conduct extensive research. Gaskell was never able to make the trip across the Atlantic to visit the United States. Therefore, she had to rely heavily upon her sources to recreate seventeenth-century Salem. Scholars generally agree that she most likely consulted Charles Upham's *Lectures on Witchcraft, Comprising a History of the Delusions in Salem* (Boston, 1831) as her main source of information (Foster 140). However, Deborah Wynne argues that "Gaskell's focus is not on specific 'facts', but an imaginative recreation of the conditions which engendered this hysterical outburst and its distorting effects on the female community" (86). Gaskell's interest is primarily in how a strict patriarchal structure could lead not only to the persecution of so many innocent women, but also to the forbiddance of the formation of a loving and supportive female community. Jenny Uglow suggests that Gaskell's interest in finally writing *Lois the Witch* after years of interest in the Salem trials was revived by "by her friendship with William Whetmore Story and her reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne, both natives of Salem" (475-476).

Though an actual physical meeting between Nathaniel Hawthorne and Elizabeth Gaskell cannot be confirmed in Gaskell's relatively large correspondence

record, she was definitely an admirer of his work. On numerous occasions she expressed a fondness for *The Scarlet Letter* and, because of her famous trip to Italy, she was familiar with the background story that led to the creation of *The Marble Faun* (Uglow 310). *Lois the Witch* contains two minor characters named Hester and one minor character named Prudence (paired with a Hester as sisters) and a major character also named Prudence with many of the same impish qualities found in Hawthorne's Prudence. Naturally, Gaskell's choices were no accident and can be considered homage to Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Gaskell also characterizes one of Hawthorne's ancestors, Judge Hathorn, as one of Lois's harsh inquisitors. Hawthorne's family altered the spelling of their surname to distance themselves from the family's association with the Salem witch trials. Gaskell includes other elements of Hawthorne's work in *Lois the Witch* including the dark and foreboding forest, the concurrent servitude and mistrust of Native Americans, and the impossibly restrictive Puritan culture. What's missing is one of the most dominant elements Hawthorne employed in his novels and stories – guilt. Gaskell repeatedly emphasizes Lois's innocence and naïveté; she is guilty only of being English and Anglican in Puritan America.

Though Gaskell was a Unitarian, her faith did not preclude her from investigating the tenets of other denominations and writing about them. As seen in "The Poor Clare," Gaskell wrote deftly about the mysticism and exoticism of the Catholic religion. In *Lois the Witch*, she elaborates on the beliefs of the Puritans and she questions the sanity of such strict religious practices both on the personal level in the character Manasseh and on the public level in the form of the witchcraft trials.

As a Victorian, Gaskell was writing during a time in which spiritualism and mesmerism were gaining in popularity. Her approach to the increased interest in such questionable practices was to interrogate the methods with reason and intellect. In "Mysteries, Memories, and Metaphors: The Salem Witchcraft Trials in the American Imagination," Gretchen Adams writes, "Spiritualism and its practitioners were regularly labeled as frauds or victims of a mass delusion similar to belief in 'witchcraft, which has not been much in favor since Cotton Mather's days when it led to deplorable circumstances'" (263). The link between spiritualism's "mass hysteria" and Puritanism's similar hysteria is not difficult to make. In the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, High Church detractors of Puritanism regularly characterized practitioners of dissenting religions as suffering from melancholia or madness. Even the philosopher John Locke weighed in on the subject in the fourth edition of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In "Melancholic Madness and the Puritans," John Sena specifies Locke's position: "The philosopher-physician undertook to analyze the basis of the Puritan 'inner light,' and concluded that the personal revelations of the enthusiast were an 'ignis fatuus' grounded on psychological aberrations and not resting on reason or logic" (305). Sena continues his analysis: "Although the sectaries continued to be subjected to the traditional charges of stupidity and hypocrisy, they were depicted by poets, divines, philosophers and physicians as suffering from insanity caused by a popular psychophysiological disorder, melancholic vapors" (308).

Therefore, a history that characterized the Puritans as insane and out of balance with reason had long been established before Gaskell wrote *Lois the Witch*.

Gaskell exploits this history to further examine how a young and innocent girl in search of a place to call home falls prey to a culture that, because of its inclination towards madness, has turned upon itself and is searching for an external cause. Lois, as an English outsider, sans friends and a teller of strange stories, sets herself up as the perfect scapegoat for a society that refuses to seek an internal answer for its multiple problems.

The Puritan culture has traditionally been viewed as a strict patriarchy, but Lois's first encounter with a New England family is the matriarchal Widow Smith's family. Here she finds genuine compassion and love and her hopes for her new life in this strange land are lifted. Gaskell describes Lois's arrival: "She kissed Lois on both cheeks, before she rightly understood who the stranger maiden was, only because she was a stranger, and looked sad and forlorn; and then she kissed her again, because Captain Holderness commended her to the widow's good offices" (143). The Widow Smith intuits Lois's needs even before she knows who she is or where she is going. Since her own mother's death, Lois has been horribly touch deprived and Widow Smith's greeting provides the comforting embrace only a woman can provide to a grieving orphan. However, Lois does not know that this form of familial physical affection is not common among her own Puritan kin. When the local Boston pastor Elder Hawkins joins the party for the meal, a closer examination of Widow Smith's conduct and that of her daughters reveals Widow Smith's entitled position in the community. Gaskell articulates the knowledge unknown to Lois: "But the widow herself was a privileged person; her known goodness of heart (the effects of which had been experienced by many) gave her

the liberty of speech which was tacitly denied to many, under penalty of being esteemed ungodly if they infringed upon certain conventional limits" (145). Lois will eventually learn that she is living under a draconian patriarchy and that the exceptions granted to Widow Smith are rarely afforded to other women.

While still dining at Widow Smith's home, Lois and the others engage in the practice of storytelling. The tales told of an Indian disguised as a log as he stealthily approaches a Puritan homestead and a woman being carried off by "French Papist" pirates in the night are meant to be as unsettling and disturbing as ghost stories, but they also contain a warning; nothing is as it seems here in this strange land. Edgar Wright explains:

The New England community is shown as an insecure one; two or three anecdotes told during Lois's first dinner in the country quickly sketch in a picture of settlements constantly threatened by Indians in the forest and pirates on the shore, with Puritan ministers urging their flock to see Satan in every enemy and each disaster. (167)

However, the true witch story that Lois tells the guests and the minister's subsequent response is quite foreboding. When Lois was only a child, she witnessed the brutal dunking of a suspected witch in Barford. Because her father was the local vicar, the dying woman vented her anger on Lois, "Parson's wench, parson's wench, yonder, in thy nurse's arms, thy dad hath never tried to save me, and none shall save thee when thou art brought up for a witch" (Gaskell 150). The woman had no idea that, even at Lois's tender young age, she felt compassion for the strange old woman. Though Captain Holderness and Widow Smith try to lighten the mood by talking

about Lois's bewitching good looks, Elder Hawkins cannot refrain from passing judgment: "I must upbraid you if ye speak lightly; charms and witchcraft are evil things. I trust this maiden hath nothing to do with them even in thought. But my mind misgives me at her story. The hellish witch might have power from Satan to infect her mind, she being yet a child, with the deadly sin" (Gaskell 150). Elder Hawkins' upbraiding and his immediate command for prayer allows Lois just a tiny peek into what Puritan living will really be like once she reaches her uncle's home in Salem.

Lois's arrival at the Hickson home is far from auspicious; she is hardly welcomed and Grace Hickson suspects her claim of kin might be false. The letter of introduction has been delayed so Lois is viewed as an invader by all save her uncle. She first meets a grim and sullen Manasseh who passes her off onto his mother without any acknowledgement of her physical presence. Before Lois can meet her uncle, Grace insults Lois's family: "His sister Barclay, she that was Henrietta Hickson, and whose husband took the oaths to Charles Stuart, and stuck by his living when all godly men left theirs —"(Gaskell 153). Grace is referring to the English civil war of the mid-seventeenth-century in which royalists and dissenters fought bitterly over both religion and government. Earlier in the novella, Gaskell refers to Lois's father as a "Jacobite" and a follower of Archbishop Laud who, early in the conflict, tried to introduce the English Book of Common Prayer into the Scottish church and was met with violent Calvinist resistance. Lois, wholly unacquainted with the history of the affront, but aware of the insult to her deceased father, retorts, "They might have been godly men who left their churches on that day of which you

“speak, madam; but they alone were not the godly men, and no one has a right to limit true godliness for mere opinion’s sake” (Gaskell 153). Lois bravely speaks her mind, but she is unaware of the horrible indignity her words are to the Puritan faith. First, Lois’s age precludes her from speaking so brazenly to an elder; not only are her actions insolent, but they are considered a major sin. Plus, she has been discourteous to her hostess; Lois has revealed a tendency towards independent thought and insubordination. This one act, courageous on Lois’s part, marks the beginning of a moral and religious feud with Grace; a woman who knows not how to forgive or grant mercy to the orphaned Lois.

In order to form a satisfying interpersonal relationship, Lois seeks sympathy and friendship in the other members of the Hickson household. Wynne writes, “Each of these cousins is damaged in some way by the repression imposed upon them by family and community” (90). However, Lois is not privy to this damage; she must discover each cousin’s predicament for herself. She has already ruined her chances of a relationship with Grace by creating a religious rivalry during their first meeting. Though she initially viewed Manasseh as friendly, she now fears his sexual advances via repeated marriage proposals phrased in insane prophetic rants. Gaskell indicates that Lois places Grace and Manasseh in the same category, “With her aunt and Manasseh it was more than want of sympathy; it was positive, active antipathy to all the ideas Lois held most dear” (159). Lois is still judged as the “other” because of her Anglican faith and her refusal to abandon her beliefs; Grace taunts her as a witless follower of a godless king, but Manasseh views her as being in error and in need of correction. She resolves to avoid both mother and son as

often as possible. She cannot tolerate Prudence's puckish and sometimes wicked behavior (pinching the servant Nattee black and blue). Lois places all of her hopes for friendship in her cousin Faith. They are roughly the same age and share many of the same household duties, which places them together much of the day (Gaskell 161). However, as hard as Lois tries to make a connection with Faith, the girl remains unreachable; her love-sickness for Pastor Nolan has driven her into a deep depression. Gaskell cleverly uses the Christian names of the Hickson family to indicate a contrariety operating beneath the surface.

The name Grace would signify a person who is compassionate, forgiving, beneficent, and generous. Grace Hickson possesses none of these characteristics; she is mean-spirited, antagonistic, mistrustful, and critical. She hardly lives up to the Christian virtue that her name implies. Prudence Hickson is also inversely named with regard to her actions. Her name, another one of the Christian virtues, implies that she would be stoic, discreet, and rational; indeed she retains none of these traits. Prudence is impish, flippant, disrespectful, and cruel. She seizes any opportunity to grab the spotlight and is usually brushed aside by her family. She takes her frustrations out on the Indian Nattee, a woman without authority or agency. Named after another Christian virtue, Faith exhibits the exact opposite characteristics that her name would suggest. She is completely without any loyalty to her religion (in fact, she could be called an agnostic), she is highly suspicious of her family and Lois, and she is often moody and secretive. She shows no signs of offering assurance, fidelity, confidence, and truthfulness as her name would imply.

Gaskell breaks the Christian virtues pattern of naming her characters when she names Manasseh. The name is unusual for the Victorian age, but was rather common for the Puritans (Gaskell, *n.* 34, 356); Manasseh is a Biblical reference to an evil king of Judah. The Biblical king offends God by building and worshipping false idols. Also among his offenses, the Bible notes: "And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger" (King James Bible II Kings 21.6). With the references to wizards and enchantments, the name Manasseh in *Lois the Witch* can be viewed as a bad omen. Gaskell's knowledge of the Bible was detailed and extensive and her use of the name can easily be interpreted as intentional. With this name, she conjures up not only history, but also a sense of foreboding.

The structure of the society further limits Lois from expressing herself or from finding healthy relationships. Living under a patriarchal system would not have been alien to the English Lois, but the Puritans amplified the structure to such an oppressive extreme, especially for women. Terence Wright concedes:

'Patriarchal' has become a commonplace of contemporary critical discourse, but the society in which Lois finds herself when she arrives in Salem is a theocracy with a truly patriarchal structure. God is represented in a very direct form by His (male) pastors, who carry His word into every home and family, not merely as a precept but as the ground of organisation and action. Male rule is unquestioned and absolute. (65)

Though initially Lois may believe that Grace is the head of the household since her uncle is terribly ill, she is mistaken. When Ralph Hickson dies, Manasseh inherits the role and Grace acquiesces to his plans for the family.

The inherent difficulty with having someone like Manasseh as the head of the household is that he is profoundly mentally ill. And Manasseh represents in microcosm the illness that has taken hold of the Salem community. Manasseh believes he has been blessed with the gift of prophecy which is most evident when he hears the "voice" telling him to marry Lois. Gaskell affirms Manasseh's troubled state of mind: "But he was so convinced, by what he considered the spirit of prophecy, that Lois was to be his wife that he felt rather more indignant at what he considered her resistance to the preordained decree, than really anxious as to the result" (170). Based on the evidence that Gaskell includes in the story and her interest in the evolving field of psychology, it seems that Manasseh would most likely be diagnosed with schizophrenia today. He is hearing auditory command hallucinations which he feels he must obey. He also exhibits symptoms compatible with psychotic behavior including visual hallucinations, delusions of grandiosity, and occasional catatonic states.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV, the tool mental health professionals use in assessing and diagnosing patients, offers the following definition of psychotic: "The narrowest definition of *psychotic* is restricted to delusions or prominent hallucinations, with the hallucinations occurring in the absence of insight into their pathological nature" (DSM-IV). Manasseh tends to fixate on one delusion: the voice telling him to 'Marry Lois' and since this delusion is thematic in nature, Manasseh's

diagnosis would be narrowed down to schizophrenic-paranoid type (DSM-IV). He is able to carry out his daily chores, but he prefers isolation and the theme of his delusion is consistent. Key to his illness has been his mother's protection and extreme efforts to keep his madness hidden from the community. She has been able to create something of a community delusion that Manasseh is a notable and learned scholar capable of discussing the most esoteric topics with great visiting ministers (Gaskell 207). As the novella progresses, Manasseh's illness becomes more intensified; however his mother and his sisters are not without their own personal mental sufferings.

Lois tries her best to gain Faith's confidence; she refuses to listen to Prudence's gossip and wants Faith to feel comfortable enough on her own to confide in her. With particular regard to Faith, the following observation by Maureen Moran is quite pertinent, "Trapped in the intense repressed world of her relatives, [Lois] is incapable of understanding her cousins' moods, obsessions, and desires" (132-133). Faith's feelings for Lois are unpredictable; sometimes she gives hints of wanting a friendship or a confidence and, even within the same day, she will completely shut Lois out. Faith is extremely moody and depressed; she has repressed her sexual desire for Pastor Nolan so deeply that she has fallen into a desperate state believing that the pastor is the only remedy for her ills. Lois tries to cheer Faith up by telling her the traditions of the English Hallowe'en. Gaskell elaborates:

As she told of tricks she had often played, of the apple eaten facing a mirror, of the dripping sheet, of the basins of water, of the nuts burning side by side, and many such other innocent ways of divination, by

which laughing, trembling English maidens sought to see the form of their husbands, if husbands they were to have, then Faith listened breathlessly, asking short, eager questions, as if some ray of hope had entered into her gloomy heart. (165)

Lois only tells the stories of divination to cheer up a despondent Faith who seems to grow worse as fall passes into winter. The driving force behind telling these tales is compassion; Lois seeks to comfort Faith, but instead her efforts backfire. She has inspired hope in Faith that the playful divinations actually work. Her stories also give Prudence evidence to build on later in her accusation of witchcraft. Prudence admonishes Faith but not Lois, "Cousin Lois may go out and meet Satan by the brook-side if she will, but if thou goest, Faith, I will tell mother" (Gaskell 165). For effect, Prudence manipulates the loudest scream she can bring forth from her body. Lois truly fears that she has scared the child; but Faith calls her bluff with a hard pinch when Prudence gives her false account of seeing "the Evil One" (Gaskell 165). In her innocent effort to provide a little entertainment to her severely depressed cousin, Lois has unleashed a sincere belief in the power of divination in Faith and a growing suspicion in Prudence.

Lois tells no such stories to Manasseh; he already has a strong belief in his own powers of divination and prophecy. Prior to Grace's knowledge of Manasseh's persistent proposals, he offers Lois the following ominous prophecy:

The visions come thick upon me, and my sight grows clearer and clearer. Only last night, camping out in the woods, I saw in my soul, between sleeping and waking, the spirit come and offer thee two lots,

and the colour of the one was white, like a bride's, and the other was black and red, which is, being interpreted, a violent death. (Gaskell 178)

Manasseh's previous entreaties in favor of marriage have never before included a threat of violence; his mental state worsens as Lois's resolve to refuse him grows stronger.

Throughout the novella, Lois seems to convey an ambivalent attitude towards sex and marriage. At Widow Smith's home, Captain Holderness mentions her bewitching good looks and hints at her special charms over men, but Lois seems to be unaware of her ability to attract men. In fact, she appears to be hiding from her growing maturity. She left England not only to seek kin, but also because she sensed that "she must not linger to be a cause of a desperate quarrel between father [Miller Lucy] and son [Hugh Lucy], while her absence might soften down matters, so that either the rich old miller might relent, or Hugh's love might cool" (Gaskell 142), but she feared that her childhood playmate may ultimately forget about her and abandon her in New England. Lois leaves her only suitor in England for an unknown life across the ocean; she does not want to be the source of a disagreement if the Lucy family takes her in after she is orphaned. But her actions indicate that she is running away from the possibility of marriage to Hugh Lucy. She unconsciously assigns herself the role of "the good girl." She doesn't want to cause any problems, take any risks, upset the order, or disrupt the illusion of her virginal innocence. Terence Wright asserts: "Her innocence and unassumingness cannot deny the

power of her sexual attractions. It is a real force, and one mysterious in its origins and autonomy" (68).

Lois does not seem to have control over her sexual force; her beauty appears to make a promise that her will and her body never intend to keep. She is wholly unaware of Pastor Nolan's feelings for her; she steadfastly believes he is in love with Faith. Lois does not consider herself a sexual being in Salem. Gaskell relays Nolan's thoughts upon meeting Lois: "His wonder was that of a carnal man – who that pretty stranger might be, who had seemed, on his first coming, so glad to see him, but had vanished instantly, apparently not to return" (176). Lois is so deep into the role of innocent virgin that she is shocked when Faith unleashes her jealous fury upon her because she has sent the pastor away when Faith begins to sob uncontrollably. Gaskell describes Lois's state: "Tears came to her eyes; not so much because her cheek was bruised, as because of the surprised pain she felt at this repulse from the cousin towards whom she was feeling most warmly and kindly" (177-178). Lois's hurt feelings are attributed to the fact that she is violently pushed away by the one cousin she thought was her friend. As Faith continues to turn on her out of female jealousy, Lois begins to recognize her position as the "other" in the house.

To make matters worse, Grace unexpectedly agrees to Manasseh's desperate plea to consent to a marriage between him and Lois. Initially Grace is horrified at the suggestion, but when Manasseh explains to her in his own words filled with mad prophecies and near blasphemous analysis of predestination, she relents. She makes her position clear to Lois: "I value thee not, save as a medicine

for Manasseh, if his mind gets disturbed again, as I have noted signs of late" (Gaskell 180). One of the few powers a woman has, even in Salem, is the right of refusal in a marriage proposal; Grace takes away that right and effectively silences Lois. Now, she is not only the "other" in the house, but she is also reduced to nothing more than a temporary psychological remedy for Manasseh's madness. Grace later indicates that the role used to be played by Faith, suggesting that Manasseh possibly fixated on his sister in a similar way to Lois in the past. Grace will use people to placate her son's psychotic episodes at the expense of the emotional well-being of his female caretakers; she cares nothing for their feelings, only that Manasseh not get so far gone that he will disgrace the family. Thus, Grace successfully traps Lois in the Hickson house without any allies who would stoop to comfort her. Even Faith now goes to Nattee when she seeks compassion; she jealously despises Lois's effect on men despite her pleas of innocence.

As tensions build to a fever pitch in the Hickson household, the Salem community also begins to experience fissures in the fabric that binds them together. First the wisest and most respected of the elders have all died within a short period leaving Salem without sound counsel. Then a strong dissension has been experienced within the church in which sides were taken between the older and more conservative Pastor Tappau and the younger candidate Nolan (Gaskell 181). Shortly after Pastor Nolan's return, the disagreement was renewed and parishioners began to re-form their oppositional groups. During this unresolved strife, Pastor Tappau's daughters, Hester and Abigail, begin to act in a strange and afflicted manner. Grace Hickson relays the information to her family:

Evil Nature! Daughters, Satan is abroad, - is close to us. I have this very hour seen him afflict two innocent children, as of old he troubled those who were possessed by him in Judea. Hester and Abigail Tappau have been contorted and convulsed by him and his servants in such shapes that I am afeard to think on; and when their father, godly Mr. Tappau, began to exhort and to pray, their howlings were like the wild beasts' of the field. (Gaskell 182-183)

Lois is severely frightened by the account; she is a confirmed believer in witchcraft based on the disquieting event in her childhood. The Puritan Hickson family is frightened as well, but Lois could have gone either way as a believer or nonbeliever.

Suzy Clarkson Holstein posits why Gaskell would position Lois as a believer in witchcraft:

Rather than distancing her doomed orphan from 'nonsensical' beliefs about witchcraft, Gaskell clearly pitches Lois squarely amid them.

Several plausible reasons for this authorial choice present themselves: the supernatural may not have seemed nonsensical to Gaskell (she wrote several rousing ghost stories); the fictional tension of the work may be stronger with a character who doubts her own self-identity; and, most fundamentally, as I have suggested, Gaskell's fiction insistently interrogates the power of toleration and forgiveness. (47-48)

The most obvious choice Gaskell may have made was to increase the tension in the work. Lois's belief in witchcraft enhances the horror of her own predicament when she is accused of witchcraft herself. Lois tries to be rational about the signs of the

Evil One's doings such as the evidence of Elder Sherringham's dead horse; she suggests that the horse died of natural causes, but Pastor Nolan counters with testimony of the horse's decidedly unnatural behavior. The terror strikes the family hard; young Prudence asks her mother "low, fearful questions" (Gaskell 184) while "Faith and Lois sat with arms entwined, as in days before the former had become jealous of the latter" (Gaskell 184). However, Grace's eldest son appears to be enthralled by the news: "Manasseh listened greedily to all this story; and when it was ended he smote upon his breast, and prayed aloud for deliverance from the Evil One; and he went on praying at intervals throughout the evening, with every mark of abject terror on his face and in his manner" (Gaskell 184).

To Manasseh's disordered mind, he believes that his prophecies are coming to fruition. This belief provokes grandiose thoughts in his mind concerning his power to fight evil and protect his family. Faith categorically denies that witchcraft or even Satan exists. She tells Lois: "I believe in him no more than I believe in heaven. Both may exist, but they are so far away that I defy them" (Gaskell 187-188). Just moments earlier, Lois had expressed her fear of Nattee as an unbaptized woman: "If she has powers beyond what she ought to have, I dread her, though I have done her no evil; nay, though I could almost say she bore me a kindly feeling. But such powers are only given by the Evil One; and the proof thereof is, as you imply, Nattee would use them on those who offend her" (Gaskell 187). Earlier in the novella, Faith and Nattee were quite close, secretly spiriting off into the kitchen tending to a boiling pot. When Mr. Nolan first called at the house, Nattee implied to Lois that her powers of conjuration had brought him to the house. No doubt folk magic was often

mistaken for witchcraft in the seventeenth-century and when Hester Tappau identifies their Indian servant Hota as the cause of her bewitchment, the crowd turns to maddening fury quite easily.

During all of the fervor surrounding the accusation of Hota, Prudence has been a quick study in the art of the bewitched victim. Prudence muses to her sister Faith, "I wonder how long I might wriggle, before great and godly folk would take so much notice of me?" (Gaskell 190) Prudence has become astutely aware of the power of the hysteric. Wynne comments on performative hysteria:

For Gaskell, hysteria is a strategy which has traditionally been used by women to engage in a power struggle, a way of resisting and wielding power. By focusing upon the historical contexts of the idea of demonic possession, Gaskell indicates the deeply rational origins for the apparent irrationality of the female hysteric. For her, hysteria is always a symptom for a social problem. (91)

Just through Prudence's offhanded remark, she indicates that she is aware of the power and attention a faked bewitchment will grant her. Women, especially children, have no means of being heard in the Puritan community. Prudence recognizes that an afflicted woman is not only heard, but is placed center stage in the community. She has always sought attention within her family albeit through negative behavior; now, she has the means to receive sympathy and compassion from her family and her community by simply making one accusation and staging a grand performance.

Naturally, Lois is her intended target; Lois is an outsider within the family and she has just denied Prudence an immediate desire – the wish to attend Hota's

hanging disguised in Lois's cloak. Faith, already angry with Lois over the note she failed to successfully deliver to Pastor Nolan, gives Prudence the suggestion, "Take care, another time, how you meddle with a witch's things" (Gaskell 201). Prudence's first accusation is in the private sphere of the home as she cries out, "Witch Lois! Witch Lois!" (Gaskell 201). Though Faith brushes aside her accusation, Prudence knows she has set the stage for her public performance. After Hota is hanged in spite of her confession, the famous Cotton Mather delivers a sermon on the powers of Satan to the overflowing crowd at the meeting house. His speech is interrupted when "a shrill, clear whistle pierced all ears" (Gaskell 204). What may have normally passed as an act of insolence during a church service is interpreted by Mather as the presence of Satan.

Prudence, well-studied in the art of possession, is found "lying rigid as a log of wood, in the convulsive position of one who suffered from an epileptic seizure" (Gaskell 204). She whispers Lois's name to Dr. Mather so that he must publicly announce the name of Lois Barclay to the congregation as the witch who has caused Prudence's suffering. Lois is left standing alone and isolated, too dumbstruck at the accusation to speak, but still aware of the hatred in the eyes of those who surround her. Adding validation to the accusation, Manasseh, in an effort to save Lois, concocts a disordered explanation of Lois's innocence that is full of crooked logic and misinterpreted dogma. His words are blasphemous and he is dangerously close to being accused himself when Grace announces that Lois has bewitched him as well. Completely friendless with two accusations of witchcraft called against her by her own kin, Lois is dragged off to the gaol.

Lois suffers as a victim of the mass hysteria that gripped Salem during the witch trials. This hysteria is precisely what John Locke referred to as the Puritan enthusiasm that he found psychologically faulty in the faith. The mass hysteria causes Lois to question her own concept of self; she wonders if the accusations could hold any truth. She mentally reviews her past conduct, her ill thoughts towards others; had she taken evil action against those who had meant her harm? Could she unintentionally be a witch? Her thoughts are interrupted by reality, an important point for Gaskell. She writes: "She took hold of the iron and saw her torn stocking – her bruised ankle, and began to cry pitifully, out of strange compassion with herself. They feared, then, that even in that cell she would find a way to escape" (211). The physical reality of the leg iron frees Lois from the mass Satanic hallucination that has overpowered Salem. She now sees her truth clearly; she is no witch and no amount of convincing, cajoling, or bribery by her inquisitors will change her mind. Terence Wright affirms this moment for Lois, "Armed with this surety she in turn becomes the subversive, undermining the assumptions of those who condemn her by refusing to lie to save herself" (71).

Lois may be fatigued from lack of sleep and too little food, but she is always certain that she is not a witch. She displays in court and in the gaol plenty of evidence to prove that she is not a witch: she is able to say the Lord's Prayer, she weeps, and she recites Psalms. Indeed, Lois's only comfort in prison is her religion; and she turns to faith as a form of self-consolation to preserve her sanity while she endures the hatred and nonsensical tests of her supernatural abilities. Finally, Lois owns her power as the "other" and exercises the ultimate right of refusal over the

powerful elders of the community. When faced with the choice of confession and life or denial and death, Lois asserts: "Sirs, I must choose death with a quiet conscience, rather than life to be gained by a lie. I am not a witch. I know not hardly what you mean when you say I am. I have done many, many things very wrong in my life, but I think God will forgive me for them for my Saviour's sake" (Gaskell 218). Lois combats their condemnation with the very religion they profess to be protecting; her belief is strong and she steadfastly maintains that God will be with her throughout the ordeal.

When Lois hears that the gaol is overflowing its capacity and that she may have to share her cell, her belief in witches is reaffirmed. She knows that she is not a witch, but she does not want to share her cell with someone who may be a consort of Satan. But when Nattee is brought to Lois's cell, Lois forgets her old suspicions and "softly wiped the old brown wrinkled face with her apron, crying over it, as she had hardly yet cried over her own sorrows" (Gaskell 222). Lois searches for a means to assuage Nattee's fears of her impending death; the old woman cannot stop shaking, her fear is so great. Holstein comments:

Lois then proceeds to comfort Nattee by telling her the Christ story. As they share their last night and are led out to die together, we recognize that the Indian woman's identification by others as 'witch' or even the possibility that Nattee truly may *be* a witch is finally less important to Lois than the old woman's identity as a human being, a recurring resolution in Gaskell. (12)

Lois is learning the most important lessons of Christian tolerance; she sees a woman in need of immediate care, so she offers her what little care she can give. The two most marginalized females, the Anglican English girl and the Indian woman, find that together they can survive the night through prayer and mutual solace.

Lois discovers that she receives more pleasure in the giving of mercy than in the reception. Lois tends to the frightened Nattee throughout the night; she finds relief for herself in the giving. With Christian grace, Lois completely gives her soul over to attending to Nattee's emotional and spiritual needs. Gaskell echoes the spirituality contained in Lois's actions: "And then Lois went on, saying all the blessed words she could remember, and comforting the helpless Indian woman with the sense of a presence of a Heavenly Friend. And in comforting her, Lois was comforted; in strengthening her, Lois was strengthened" (222). In her last hours, Lois brings Nattee more human compassion and understanding than any white settler has ever deemed her worthy of before her imprisonment.

Lois will not part from Nattee even as they are taken out of the prison to face the gallows. Her full sense of purpose is in comforting Nattee as they are led to their deaths; Lois is not even aware that she is also one of the condemned. She is so absorbed with attending to Nattee and soothing her fears that she only becomes cognizant of the true nature of the events surrounding her *after* Nattee is hanged. Suddenly the immediate presence of her own impending death becomes all too real. Gaskell offers the following account of the horrific event: "[Lois] gazed wildly around, stretched out her arms as if to some person in the distance, who was yet visible to

her, and cried out once with a voice that thrilled through all who heard it, 'Mother!'" (223).

Lois's final cry for 'Mother' is a cry for the protective maternal force one recognizes as powerful since infancy. Lois is still just a girl and at the moment of execution she mourns the absence of her dead mother while still instinctively calling for her as if she were present. Her plea for 'Mother' also indicates the disrespect the power of the maternal has received in the Salem community. The women in Salem have been forced into a compulsory silence by the dominant patriarchy; they have no means of speaking in public or having their opinions heard, even inside their own homes. Hearing Lois howl 'Mother' as she is being hanged has a chilling effect for all who were present; they know the orphan girl has no mother, but the cry also indicates that she has no love either. Finally, the moment is poignant for Gaskell herself; her mother died when she was only thirteen months old. She was ultimately raised by her maternal aunts, but she still yearned for her mother. Jenny Uglow notes: "Elizabeth was loved and cared for and never without friends as she grew up within these great clusters of aunts, uncles, cousins and second cousins, embracing almost three generations at once. Yet in a corner of her mind she felt alone. Knutsford was full of reminders of the mother she had hardly known" (19). Thus, Gaskell knows the secret pain of the orphan, even when provided with loving care. Lois's cry for 'Mother' can also be seen as Gaskell's cry for her own mother and, unconditionally, a cry for the universal mother that patriarchy seeks to repress.

Immediately following the hanging of Lois, the crowd seems to realize the great tragedy their enthusiastic witch hunting has caused. Instead of boisterous and

rowdy behavior, they are silent and reverent. Gaskell relays the scene: "Directly afterwards, the body of Lois the Witch swung in the air, and every one stood, with hushed breath, with a sudden wonder, like a fear of a deadly crime, fallen upon them" (223). The image of young Lois hanging dead proves to be too much for the community to morally handle. The people reactivate their rational senses and realize the gravity of their actions.

Gaskell could have ended her novella here, which would have had a great dramatic effect. However, she continues to illustrate the regret and atonement of Lois's persecutors. A document is produced and signed by those members of the community who took part in the Salem witch trials and they admit to being "under the power of a strong and general delusion" (Gaskell 225). The Salem community finally admits its culpability in the hanging of innocent men and women who were accused of witchcraft. Ralph Lucy (Gaskell inexplicably changed his name from Hugh), who has traveled to reclaim Lois, scoffs at their efforts to repent. He bemoans, "All this will not bring my Lois to life again, or give me back the hope of my youth" (Gaskell 225). However, when he discovers that Justice Sewall, chief among Lois's inquisitors, has set apart a day for prayer and repentance to atone for his direct actions during the trials, he decides to "join my prayers as long as I live with the repentant judge" (Gaskell 226). He adds, "She would have willed it so" (Gaskell 226).

The last words spoken by Ralph are the last words of the novella and they perfectly reflect the philosophy Gaskell wants to depict in *Lois the Witch*. She illustrates through these words that Lois was a tolerant, loving, and forgiving girl and

that she would have granted mercy to her accusers if they had only asked for it. She was confused by their hatred and their characterization of her person. When she was given the opportunity to provide love to a needy soul, she expressed her spiritual affections with abandon. Therefore, the tragedy of *Lois the Witch* is that the kindest, most loving, most spiritual, and most giving member of the community has been put to death by people more concerned with finding sin than with valuing virtue.

Through the use of the historical fiction genre, Gaskell has managed to interweave nineteenth-century Unitarian beliefs of Christian tolerance and openness into a narrative involving Puritan repression and persecution. Lois represents the Christian virtues that are lacking in their Hickson namesakes and the Salem community. She is hopeful, graceful and prudent and she deftly exhibits these attributes at her darkest hour. She discovers that she could find more comfort in the giving of love and solace than in the desperate desire to receive such gifts. Her time with Nattee in the prison gives her the opportunity to be an active Christian; she demonstrates scriptural teachings with her actions and not through sermons and proclamations as is done by the ministers in Salem. Her behavior presents the counter-argument to Puritan dogma. For Lois, a virtuous life involves giving, loving, and caring, as well as expressing mercy and empathy. Lois's values contrast with her cousins' chaotic and disordered values. Predetermination and patriarchal oppression have caused a spiritual illness to spread through the family. Fear of sin has trumped love of virtue and the Hicksons become defensive if the slightest character flaw is called to attention. They cannot find pleasure in giving because they are fearful and suspicious of the receiver.

It is no wonder that in such a panic-stricken culture some members would have to be sacrificed in order to quell the superstitious nightmares of the power elite. When sermons in meeting houses consistently focus on the predominance of Satan, the power of suggestion can overwhelm a community; every small malady or abnormality is suddenly blamed on the presence of the devil. Then the whole community participates in searching for signs of Satan's presence. Thus, mass hysteria builds and false accusations are believed. Gaskell advocates a rational and educated approach to theology. She would have had the Salem residents question their pastors more closely about the presence of the devil. However, she cleverly crafts a narrative in which her heroine believes in witches, but finds the belief inconsequential when called upon to comfort another suffering human being.

In *Lois the Witch*, Gaskell demonstrates the dangers of an unchecked patriarchy. The men in Salem are granted absolute authority without ever having to consult the voices of women. With a madman as the head of a household consisting of all women, Gaskell illustrates how unquestioned male domination can go terribly awry. Through *Lois the Witch*, Gaskell emphasizes the importance of the public contribution of the female voice. Lois's last word, 'Mother,' resonates throughout the entire community as a wake-up call. Disrespected and oppressed females do not submit quietly to autocratic patriarchy forever. Gaskell creates female characters willing to subvert the patriarchy's demand for feminine silence; whether it is through Prudence's performative hysteria or Lois's refusal to falsely confess. Gaskell proves that an unchecked patriarchy cannot survive long because there will always be women who will discover the strength within themselves to resist.

Conclusion

Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction still has resonance today unquestionably because of her ability to connect emotionally to her readers. She avoids the heavy didacticism that was prevalent in the novels of her time. She opts instead for her characters to learn the life lessons required to obtain emotional maturity and allows her readers to discern for themselves the meritorious quality of her work. She displays a deep insight into the psychology of her characters just as that discipline was being officially formed into a science. She is frank about the need for reform just as the industrial revolution began to automate people's lives and discard the emotional selves. She commits herself to promoting human tolerance and kindness and breaking down class barriers to the point in which everyone sees each other through humanitarian eyes. She firmly believes in agape; a love that goes beyond romance or friendship to a spiritual love for all mankind. She challenges her readers to examine the damaging power of a patriarchy that attempts to quell female voices. Thus, her fiction has reached beyond the English-speaking community and is now enjoying world-wide appeal.

Japan is one country in which Gaskell's works have enjoyed a wide audience. The Japanese desire to learn English had been traditionally approached to just give enough reading-level English to the students so that they could read books on foreign ideas and technology (Kanamaru 101). Actual study of English literature was not high on the agenda. However, with globalization taking hold all over the world, Japan stepped up their English studies programs to include literature. Gaskell's fiction as well as the works of George Eliot, Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf and

Charlotte and Emily Brontë was translated into Japanese. As more young women entered universities the demand for books written by women increased (Yamawaki 97). According to Yuriko Yamawaki, "Some 40 students every year choose English women writers for their graduation theses, and of course these include Mrs. Gaskell" (96). Female students demand for more texts written by women appears to be a challenge to the traditional patriarchal structure of Japan. Feminism has traditionally struggled against the strong history of male domination and the preference for masculine images in Japanese culture. The increasing popularity of texts written by women could possibly indicate a more positive future for feminism in forthcoming generations. Though Gaskell's fiction certainly has a wide appeal for Japanese students, there must be reasons beyond a rising interest in feminism to account for her individual popularity.

Japan, in many ways, has still not come to terms with the country's actions during World War II. The abominable treatment of POW's and the chemical weapons test that killed thousands of Chinese civilians are difficult to reconcile with the Japanese moral conscience. What troubles Japanese citizens most was the blind obedience to power (Kanamaru 103). Even more recently, Japan dedicated itself to a collectivist social idealism, rather than acknowledging the needs of the individual. Chiyuki Kanamaru explains the crisis, "How can an individual, whose spirit has been shattered by his or her country's demands, regain a sense of balance in life?" (103) Contained in this question is Gaskell's special appeal to the Japanese. Her promotion of acceptance and tolerance as well as her stance on individualism appeals to Japanese readers as an alternative to rigid obedience to the

state. Gaskell does not advocate the rugged individualism practiced by the transcendentalist; she believes in an existence in which one is true to one's morality while maintaining a support network of friends and relatives.

Kanumaru expresses the validity of reading Gaskell today:

Gaskell does teach us tolerance, good nature, and kindness. All these things are just as important as English speaking skills for the Japanese people. Learning English is a priceless gift that enables us to use our hard-earned skills to the best advantage, in a loving human, and caring way, rather than in an abstract, mechanical, and heartless way. (104)

Kanumaru sees the reading of Gaskell as bringing more humanism to the Japanese culture. Decades ago, they were singularly focused on becoming technical giants in industry, but now, according to Kanumaru and Yamawaki, the culture is reading literary texts looking for an infusion of humanistic ideas. Tolerance of others, namely foreigners, is a major step for a country with such a long history of isolationism.

Yamawaki describes Gaskell's special appeal: "All of the students in my class have a deep interest in the works of Elizabeth Gaskell. Their central theme of love which is self-sacrifice seems to impress the students very deeply" (97). Gaskell's fiction has this universal appeal precisely because she addresses the human condition and provides hope for the betterment of all mankind.

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